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The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Cincinnati

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THE RISE OF THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT IN CINCINNATI

by

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of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The war which was fought in the United States from 1861 to 1865 remains one of the most interesting epochs of American history. To this day historians are not in agreement as to what this war should be called. Was it a civil war, a rebellion, or a war for Southern independence? This disagreement as to the name to be applied to the war stems directly from the much more heated controversy as to which of the causes contributing to the outbreak of the war should receive the most emphasis. There are those who say that the war was forced on the South as the final act in the crusade to abolish slavery. Others contend that it was the question of states' rights versus nationalism which ultimately caused the war. Still others say that it is in the dissimilar economic development of the two sections involved that we must look for the final explanation of the conflict, and occasional hints are made by some to the work of the irresponsible agitators in both the North and the South. Yet, however divergent their opinions might be as to the ultimate explanation of the coming of the war, historians are generally agreed that there would have been no war in 1861 if there had been no American Negro slavery, and consequently no anti-slavery movement.¹ In the end, all explanations of the war of 1861 find

¹For a documentary discussion of the causes of the Civil War, cf. Richard W. Leopold and Arthur S. Link, Problems in American History, pp. 372-426

their way back to the abolition indictment of slavery.

The history of the American anti-slavery movement divides itself into three distinct periods. The first is centered around the activities of the American Colonization Society, an organization which drew on all sections of the country and on all classes of society for its support. In its ranks could be found, working in close harmony, slaveholders and non-slaveholders, pro-slavery and anti-slavery advocates, who for one reason or another sought the expatriation of the free Negroes of the United States. This first period came to an end in 1833, the year in which the American Anti-Slavery Society was formed in Philadelphia. By this time the question of slavery had become almost entirely sectional.

Between the years 1833 and 1839 lay a period in which the line between the supporters of anti-slavery agitation and the defenders of slavery was sharply drawn. It was during this period that the designs and principles of the abolition movement were clearly defined and explained, and a vast network of anti-slavery societies appeared in the Northern states.

Beginning in 1839 and continuing until the outbreak of hostilities in 1861, the third period of the anti-slavery movement saw the adoption of the principles of direct political action by the abolitionists and the formation of the Liberty Party.²

It is the purpose of this thesis to trace the development of the anti-slavery movement in Cincinnati during the years 1833 to 1845 and to show the

²Dwight L. Dumond, The Anti-Slavery Origins of the Civil War, (New York, 1938), p. 5

the importance of the role played by the abolitionists of the Queen City in relation to the anti-slavery movement as a whole. Until recent years discussions of the anti-slavery movement in the United States have neglected, for the most part, the work done in Cincinnati. Yet, Cincinnati was the scene of the early labors of many of the most prominent figures of the anti-slavery movement, men like Theodore Weld, James Birney, Salmon Chase, Levi Coffin, and the students of Lane Seminary who were to be the apostles of the Anti-Slavery Society throughout the North and the East.³ Adding to the work performed by these men the fact that Cincinnati was perhaps the most important station on the Underground Railroad, and the scene of some of the most important fugitive slave cases tried in United States Federal Courts, one can say with little fear of exaggeration that in Cincinnati were struck the sparks that fired the North with anti-slavery sentiment and eventually caused the mighty conflagration that was the Civil War.

Though the problem of slavery first came to the fore as an issue to be faced by the Nation as a whole in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the roots of the anti-slavery movement antedate, by many years, the debates of this august assemblage. Almost from the introduction of slavery into the colonies, certain religious groups, notably the Quakers and the Mennonites, had voiced their protest against the institution. The earliest recorded protest is that of the

³Books published on the subject of the anti-slavery movement before 1930 give little, if any, attention to the anti-slavery agitation in Cincinnati. It was not until Professors Barnes and Dumond began their studies of the subject that the importance of the Midwest and of Cincinnati in particular were recognized. Their conclusions may be found in The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844 by Professor Barnes, and in the Anti-Slavery Origins of the Civil War by Professor Dumond.

Resolutions of the Germantown Mennonites on February 18, 1688, in which they list the reasons "why we are against the traffic of men-body."⁴

In the summer of 1787, when the Constitutional Convention was meeting in Philadelphia, the question of slavery and slave representation was an issue of importance. It is in the debates concerning this problem that we first observe signs of disagreement between the slaveholders of the South and the commercial interests of the North. James Madison, reporting the proceedings of the Convention, has left us a record of the sentiments of the various members of the Convention on the subject. He reports Mr. Gouveneur Morris as having said that

He would never concur in upholding domestic slavery. It was a nefarious institution. It was the curse of heaven on the states where it prevailed ...The admission of slaves into representation, when fairly explained, comes to this: that the inhabitant of Georgia or South Carolina who goes to the coast of Africa, and, in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity, tears away his fellow-creature from their dearest connections and dooms them to the most cruel bondage, shall have more votes in a government instituted for the protection of the rights of mankind than the citizen of New Jersey who views with a laudable horror so nefarious a practice. He would add that domestic slavery is the most prominent feature in the aristocratic countenance of the proposed constitution.⁵

Mr. Luther Martin, a representative from Maryland, also voiced his protest against slavery, stating that the institution "was inconsistent with the principles of the Revolution," and that it was "dishonorable to the American character to have such a feature in the Constitution."⁶

⁴Henry Steele Commager, Documents of American History (New York, 1943), p. 37

⁵Marion M. Miller (ed.), Great American Debates, (New York, 1913) I, p.355

⁶Ibid., p. 356

However, we should not be led to believe that slavery was one of the major issues before the Convention. In reality the problem of slavery, slave-trade, and the counting of slaves in determining the size of representation in the Lower House were only minor irritants and did not seriously divide the Convention. There was no question at this time as to whether the Union "could endure permanently half slave and half free." As one author, writing of the Convention, puts it,

In 1787, slavery was not the important question, it might be said that it was not the moral question that it later became. The proceedings of the Federal Convention did not become known until the slavery question had grown to the paramount issue of the day. Men naturally were eager to know what the framers of the Constitution had said and done upon this all-absorbing question. This led to an overemphasis of the slavery question in the Convention that has persisted to the present day. As a matter of fact, there was comparatively little said on the subject in the Convention. Madison was one of the very few men who seemed to appreciate the real division of interest in this country. It is significant that in the debate on proportional representation, he felt it necessary to warn the Convention that it was not the size of the states but that 'the great danger to our general government is the great Southern and Northern interests of the continent being opposed to each other.'⁷

Though there were those in the Constitutional Convention who objected to slavery on moral ground, the vast majority of the delegates seemed to feel only irritation towards these objections and the consequent attitude of the representatives from North Carolina and Georgia who declared that their states would never accept a constitution "if it prohibits the slave trade."⁸ The opinion of the majority was well put by Representative Ellsworth who said: "Let

⁷Max Farrand, The Framing of the Constitution of the United States, (New Haven, 1913), p. 110

⁸House Document No. 398, Documents Illustrative of the Formation of the Union of the American States, (Washington, 1927), p. 589

every state import what it pleases. The morality or wisdom of slavery are considerations belonging to the states themselves. What enriches part enriches the whole, and the states are the best judges of their particular interests. The old confederation had not meddled with this point, and he did not see any greater necessity for bringing it within the policy of the new one."⁹ In the end the Constitutional Convention, an eminently practical body which realized the value of compromise when it was necessary, left the solution of the problem to the states with a promise that there would be no interference from Congress in this matter until the year 1808. The conclusion thus reached by the Convention was incorporated into the Constitution. "The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the states now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person."¹⁰

Only on one other point does our Constitution treat the question of slavery, namely, what was to be done with regard to fugitive slaves. It is significant that there was almost no opposition to the proposal that states give up fugitive slaves to their masters. This obligation had already been provided for in some of the treaties with Indian tribes between the years 1781 and 1786.¹¹ This clause met with no opposition even from those who had been so

⁹House Document No. 398, p. 589

¹⁰Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution of the United States as it is found in Richard B. Morris, Encyclopedia of American History, (New York, 1953) p. 451.

¹¹John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, (New York, 1948) p. 142

outspoken in the previous debate on the slavery question. According to the testimony of Mr. Madison, there was no debate and but a minor amendment to the clause. This amendment, it would seem, was an attempt to set at ease the consciences of some of the delegates. In the clause the term "legally" was replaced by the phrase "under the laws thereof" at the request of the delegates who thought the term "legally" equivocal, and favoring the idea that slavery was legal from a moral viewpoint.¹² This change being made, the clause for the return of fugitive slaves was unanimously agreed to and incorporated into the Constitution. "No person held to service or Labour in one State, under the laws thereof, excaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due."¹³

During the years immediately following the adoption of the Constitution, slavery existed in nearly all the States of the Union, but, as was to be expected, it was far stronger in the South than in the North. Left to determine the status of slavery in their own boundaries by the Constitution, the northern states abolished the institution; the southern states, whose economy depended on the labors of a large number of Negro fieldhands, retained it. The states north of the Mason-Dixon line tended towards anti-slavery views at this time but not with the aggressive spirit that was characteristic of the years immediately preceding the Civil War. In the South the attitude of most men

¹²House Document No. 398, p. 734

¹³Article IV, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution of the United States, as found in Morris, Encyclopedia, p. 456

was definitely pro-slavery. But even here was to be found a good deal of strong anti-slavery sentiment. The opinion held by the average man, in both the North and the South, was that slavery could not be violently uprooted; that it must be tolerated and protected for a time; and that it would eventually, if left to itself, die a natural and peaceful death.

The Northwest Ordinance while prohibiting slavery within the confines of the Northwest Territory, once again recognized the right of other states to decide for themselves the legality or illegality of slavery within their own boundaries. The sixth article of the Northwest Ordinance provided for the return of fugitive slaves to their masters, thus recognizing anew a man's right to hold slaves provided the laws of his state permitted it. "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: Provided, always, that any person escaping into the same from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her service or labor as aforesaid."¹⁴ This article, like its sister article in the Federal Constitution, was a compromise. The fact of the matter is that this article was not even a part of the original draft of the Ordinance, but was introduced during the second reading.¹⁵ Its introduction into the final draft is

¹⁴Henry Steele Commager, Documents of American History, (New York, 1943), p. 132

¹⁵B.A. Hinsdale, The Old Northwest, (New York, 1888), p. 346; Clarence E. Carter, ed., The Territorial Papers of the United States, (Washington, 1934), II, p. 49, n. 34

probably due in large measure to the pressure of the lobbyists representing the Ohio Company whose proposed purchase of 5,000,000 acres of the Northwest Territory would not have been carried through without it.¹⁶

One other concession of the Ordinance in effect recognized the legality of slavery under the laws of the individual States. This concession was made in favor of the French living in and around Kaskaskia and Vincennes who were permitted to keep their own laws and customs relative to the descent and the conveyance of property. This was in accord with the Virginia Act of Cession of 1783 whereby the delegates of the State were authorized by the Legislature of Virginia "to convey to the United States all the rights of that commonwealth to the territory northwest of the river Ohio."¹⁷ A stipulation of this act stated that "the French and Canadian inhabitants, and other settlers of the Kaskaskies, Saint Vincents, and the neighboring villages, who have professed themselves citizens of Virginia, shall have their possessions and titles confirmed to them, and be protected in the enjoyment of their rights and liberties."¹⁸ Lest there be any doubt as to the position of these French "citizens of Virginia" dwelling in the Northwest Territory with regard to the holding of slaves, a Committee of Congress gave the following interpretation of the sixth article of the Ordinance:

The Com^o consisting of M^r Clark M^r Williamson & M^r Madison to whom were

¹⁶Carter, Territorial Papers, II, p. 346

¹⁷Daniel J. Ryan, "From Charter to Constitution," Ohio Archeological and Historical Society Publications, V (Columbus, 1897), p. 46

¹⁸Ibid., p. 47

were referred the memorial of M^r Tardiveau Agent of the French and American inhabitants of the Illinois and Post S^t Vincents, report, that in and by the Ordinance for the Government of the Western territory passed on the 13th day of 1787, it is ordained that, 'There shall be neither Slavery nor involuntary Servitude in the said territory otherwise than in the punishment of Crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,' And whereas since the passing of said Ordinance it appears there were at that time Negroes under Servitude to the inhabitants then residing at Kaskaskias Illinois Post S^t Vincents and other of the Antient (sic) French Settlements whose Right to the property they possessed were guaranteed by Congress in their act Accepting the Cession of Claim to Western territory made by the State of Virginia; which right of property it was not the intention of Congress to violate by said Ordinance but merely to restrain the Settlers in future from carrying persons under Servitude into the Western territory, for remedy thereof: Resolved, that the before mentioned Ordinance for the government of the Western territory shall not be construed to deprive the inhabitants of Kaskaskias Illinois Post S^t Vincents and the other Villages formerly settled by the French and Canadians, of their right and property in Negro or other Slaves which they were possessed of at the time of passing the said Ordinance, or in any manner to manumit or set free any such Negroes or other persons under Servitude within any part of sd Western territory; anything in the said Ordinance to the contrary notwithstanding.¹⁹

Therefore, even though the Ordinance explicitly forbade slavery in the Northwest Territory, the interpretations of the clause were such as to allow the existence of slavery under the Ordinance. The governors of the territory further interpreted the sixth article as not being retroactive even to the extent of not ending existing slavery. A postscript to a letter from Governor St. Clair to the President gives us the interpretation which he followed in dealing with the matter. "I have thought proper to explain the Article respecting Slaves as a prohibition to any future introduction of them, but not to extend to the liberation of those the People were already possessed of, and acquired under the sanction of the Laws they were subject to, at the same time I have given them to understand that Steps would probably be taken to the

¹⁹Carter, Territorial Papers, II, p. 149

gradual Abolition of Slavery, with which they seemd perfectly satisfied."²⁰

Taking into consideration these interpretations of the sixth article of the ordinance and the apparent failure of the governors to enforce the prohibition, we must say that the article represented neither a pro-slavery defeat nor an anti-slavery victory. Taken at its face value it was merely a feature, though an important one, of the machinery of government provided for the North-west.

Although violated and circumvented, and though slaves lived and labored under its rule, this prohibition served a twofold purpose as far as the status of slavery in the State of Ohio was concerned. First, it discouraged slaveholders from the South from migrating to and settling in Ohio. Secondly, it was instrumental in forcing the delegates at the Ohio Constitution Convention to incorporate an anti-slavery clause into the Bill of Rights of the State Constitution, since they feared that the exclusion of such a clause might cause Congress to refuse to admit the new state into the Union.²¹

A study of the Convention which drew up the Ohio Constitution in 1802 is interesting for the light that it throws on the attitudes toward slavery that prevailed in Ohio at that time. However, it is outside the scope of this work to delve deeply into the proceedings of this convention, but a cursory glance at the results of the convention will indicate to us the general feeling toward slavery prevalent in Ohio at that time.

In all, more than one hundred propositions regarding the status of people

²⁰Carter, Territorial Papers, II, p.248

²¹John D. Barnhart, Valley of Democracy, (Bloomington, 1953), p. 136

of color were presented to the Convention, ranging from those that merely expressed toleration of Negroes in Ohio to those which sought full citizenship for the Negro. Nevertheless, there was not one demand made to the legalization of slavery in Ohio.²² Though the delegates differed sharply on other questions concerning the status of the Negro in Ohio, on one point they were in complete agreement, namely, Ohio did not want slavery within its boundaries. Therefore, the following clause was incorporated into the Bill of Rights by a unanimous vote. "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in this State otherwise than for the punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."²³

From the various amendments proposed and from the way in which they were received by the delegates, it is evident that the free Negro was not welcome in Ohio even though slavery had been definitely prohibited by the Ohio Constitution. The intention of the founding father of Ohio was that the Negro should occupy the same position in Ohio as the Indian does in the United States. He could live in the state, would be protected by its laws, but he was denied any part in the political life of the state.²⁴

In the voting at the Convention, the delegates from the Cincinnati area

²²Charles Jay Wilson, "The Negro in Early Ohio," Ohio Archeological and Historical Society Publications XXXIX, (Columbus, 1930) p. 739. From the viewpoint of a detailed analysis of the voting at the Convention and the state of mind that this voting was indicative of, this article, later turned into a master's thesis at the University of Cincinnati, is invaluable. A complete record of the voting will be found in Ryan, "From Charter to Constitution," p. 80-153

²³Article VIII, Section 2, Constitution of the State of Ohio

²⁴Wilson, p. 753

showed themselves inclined to be sympathetic toward the Negro. They had voted in favor of Negro suffrage, and against the proposed limitations on the rights of the Negro.²⁵ This would seem to indicate that any pro-slavery sentiment in and around Cincinnati was at this time in a minority and that Cincinnati had not as yet become closely enough linked with the South through commercial ties to cause her people to be especially considerate of the southern point of view with regard to the slavery question.

In the decades immediately following the adoption of the Federal Constitution, there was little real anti-slavery agitation in the United States. What agitation there was, was sporadic, unorganized, and the work of individual men rather than groups. It was not until 1816 that a definite plan and system was given to the work of bettering the plight of the Negro in America. Under the leadership of Rev. Robert Finley of Basking Ridge, New Jersey, plans were formulated for the American Colonization Society, which was organized in Washington, D.C., in December, 1816. Even this society was not what we would call an anti-slavery group, for its purpose was not the abolition of slavery but rather it was intended to serve as an answer to the problem of what was to be done with the "freed" Negro who could not adjust himself to American life. In reality the colonization movement was fundamentally a movement inspired by race prejudice based on "an uncritical acceptance of the theory of biological inequality and racial inferiority of the Negro."²⁶

The original purpose of the American Colonization Society was four-fold: "(1) to rid the United States of an undesirable population; (2) to plant a

²⁵Wilson, p. 751

²⁶Dumond, Anti-Slavery Origins, p. 14

nucleus of Christian Negroes in Africa as a means of civilizing that continent; (3) to place the colonists in an atmosphere more congenial to the development of latent talents than existed here; (4) to some degree to hasten emancipation."²⁷ With such a program it is no wonder that the Society did have the support of a large number of individual citizens, both North and South, but also of the Federal Government and more than a dozen state legislatures, including those of the slaveholding states of Maryland, Virginia and Kentucky.²⁸ Reasons for supporting the movement were multiple and varied according to sections. In the South some of the more humanitarian slaveholders saw in it the only possible method whereby they would be able to manumit their slaves and avoid the legal restrictions of their states. Others, and these were by far the more numerous, saw in the plan a means of ridding their communities of a disturbing element - an element that found no place in their social system, an element that was, indeed, a constant threat to the security of that system.

In the North the movement was readily accepted by the humanitarians as a benevolent enterprise. To the less idealistic it offered an opportunity of ridding their states of what they believed to be a permanently degraded element of the population. In the North the "Black Codes" and colonization were closely related, and principally supported by the social aristocracy.²⁹

Constant insistence of the missionaries of the Society on the belief that the freed Negro in this country was destined to a permanent status of misery

²⁷Dwight L. Dumond, ed., Letters of James Gillespie Birney, (New York, 1938), p. v

²⁸Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 235

²⁹Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, p. vi

degradation, repeated assertions that the removal of the already emancipated slaves would hasten total emancipation, and belief that a handful of Christian Negroes was all that was necessary for the redemption of the pagan continent of Africa were sufficient to win the support of the North, then swept by a wave of humanitarianism, to the cause of Colonization. This humanitarian appeal was responsible for the fact that many prominent abolitionists whose interest in the Negro question antedated 1830 were converted to the program of the colonizationists. Among these were Lewis Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, James G. Birney, and Theodore Weld.

It is interesting to note in connection with this movement that Ohio was a particular stronghold of the Society. The various auxiliaries of the Society in Ohio were not formed out of any humanitarian motives. The advocates of colonization in Ohio, and particularly those in and around Hamilton County, were not prompted by desires to emancipate the slave or to elevate the free blacks within their boundaries. They simply wanted to rid themselves of what they considered an undesirable and degraded element.³⁰ This fact is important since it does give some indication of the attitude toward the Negro of the Ohioans of the day.

Belief in the racial inferiority and biological inequality of the Negro, which was the basic thesis of the Colonization Society, was, in the end, the cause of its undoing. Suspicious of the support that the Society received from the slaveholders, men of intelligence who sincerely wished to help the Negro, both free and slave, began to question the tenets of the Society.

³⁰Dumond, Anti-Slavery Origins, p. 14

"The boldest among them - one might say, the intellectually and morally courageous - examined the question in the light of the New Testament and Jeffersonian humanitarianism, publically confessed the error of their previous position, straightway launched a devastating attack on colonization as the epitome of racial prejudice, and endorsed immediate emancipation as the only way to national and individual salvation. The sin of slavery vs. slavery as a positive good to both races immediately became the issue."³¹

The militant anti-slavery movement that had developed by 1831 saw in colonization a method of draining off the free Negroes in order to make slavery more secure. William Lloyd Garrison wrote that the American Colonization Society had "inflicted a great injury upon the free and slave population; first by strengthening the prejudices of the people; secondly, by discouraging the education of those who are free; thirdly, by inducing passage of severe legislative enactments; and finally, by lulling the whole country into a deep sleep."³²

With the rise of militant abolitionism in the North, the influence and popularity of the colonization movement waned, and though remnants of it remained until the outbreak of the Civil War, its influence on the thought of the North was inconsequential.

The abolition movement that developed around 1831 was basically a religious movement, having close connections with the larger humanitarian movement that was then sweeping the North. This movement showed itself in

³¹Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, p. vi

³²Quoted in Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 242-243

growing public concern for the welfare of the underprivileged, among whom were the Negro slaves. In the West, the anti-slavery movement was connected with the Great Revival preached by Charles G. Finney who emphasized the importance of being useful to society, a doctrine which released a powerful impulse toward social reform. One of Finney's earliest and most ardent followers was young Theodore Weld who was to become the apostle, par excellence, of the abolition movement in Ohio.

Arguments of the abolitionists against slavery were elaborate and well thought out. In the first place, they contended that slavery was contrary to the basic teachings of Christianity on the brotherhood and equality of all men before God. Moreover, slavery was a contradiction of the basic tenets of the American way of life which teach us that "all men are created equal." Slavery was a denial of the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Economically slavery was unsound for it could not be expected that slave labor would be as efficient as free labor. Slavery was also detrimental to culture and civilization since it tended to bring out the baser qualities of both slaves and master. Lastly, the abolitionists contended that slavery was a serious threat to the peace and safety of the nation for the constant fear of a widespread uprising of the slaves had turned the South into an armed camp.³³

With the formulation of these principles, the abolitionists were now ready to begin an organized battle against the institution of slavery. The first of the organizers, and perhaps the most well known, was William Lloyd Garrison, who with a handful of followers formed the New England Anti-Slavery Society in

³³A full explanation of these arguments is to be found in Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 242

1831. However, Garrison's views were at times too radical and vociferous for the more moderate group of abolitionists, and in the end his outspokenness and insistence on certain points were to bring about a schism in the abolitionist ranks.

In December, 1833, a convention inspired by the moderate element in the abolitionist camp met in Philadelphia. This convention founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, electing Arthur Tappan, a wealthy New York merchant, as its first president. The line of conduct which the Society proposed to follow was one of moral suasion; its aim, to convince the nation of the sin of slavery.

In its first year the Society met with little success. In fact, its work was met with definite hostility. In order to associate itself with the triumphant cause of British abolition, the Society had adopted the British motto of "immediate abolition." Despite the fact that the Society had interpreted this to mean "immediate emancipation, gradually begun," the public took the motto in its literal meaning, and the public of the North was not yet ready for a doctrine of immediatism. Another handicap which hampered the Society's work was the unfortunate reputation of Garrison who was a member of the Society's governing board. Though he had not been an initiator of the Society and the office he held in it was a minor one, his mere participation was enough to give the whole movement the coloring of fanaticism in the public eye. "He was continually called the father of the society, and the Liberator was popularly considered its organ. Over the entire agitation his name cast 'a vague and indefinite odium' which hampered its growth from the beginning."³⁴

³³Barnes, Gilbert and Dwight Dumond, ed., Letters of Theodore Weld, Angelina Grimke, and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844, (New York, 1934), p. viii

Burdened as it was with the epithet of "Garrisonism" and its misunderstood motto of immediatism, the Society made little progress among the anti-slavery public of the North. Even in those sections where the anti-slavery spirit was most intense, the agents of the Society encountered displays of hostility and indignation. The pamphlet crusade of the Society fared little better than its agents. The motto of immediatism was so difficult to explain and so open to misinterpretation that the written word proved of little value to the movement.

Early in 1835, as the first year of agitation came to a close, the leaders of the movement had to admit to themselves that "matters were tending toward a disastrous result."³⁵ In the East the anti-slavery public was still indifferent or even hostile to the immediatist demand. Agitation by agents was at a standstill; the pamphlet propaganda, barred from the South by postal authorities evoked little but antagonism and resentment.

Stymied in the East and the South, the abolitionist leaders turned to the West for a solution to their problems. In Cincinnati they found their answer in the students of Lane Seminary. These young men were to be the salvation of the organized crusade against slavery, for in their hands it became a revival in benevolence, a revival which they preached with immediate and extraordinary success.

³⁵Dumond and Barnes, ed., Weld-Grimke Letters, p. ix

CHAPTER II

THE ATTITUDE OF CINCINNATIANS TOWARD SLAVERY

Cincinnati in the early 1830's was in a position that was quite unusual, one might say, unique. At no time in our history has there been a city situated like Cincinnati in those days. It was a Southern city on free soil. A majority of its citizens were Southerners. Most of the goods sold by the city's merchants were meant for Southern consumption. At that time the principal trade of Cincinnati was in provisions, and each day saw the departure a multitude of steamboats from the wharves of the city, loaded with immense quantities of corn and other grains intended for the sugar and cotton plantations of the deep South or the port of Mobile.¹ In turn a good deal of Cincinnati's market produce was grown in the South.² In the streets of the city one was more apt to hear the soft, slurred speech of the South than Yankee twang. Many of the servants of the wealthy citizens of Cincinnati were slaves, hired from masters across the river in Kentucky.³ The culture and tone of the city was Southern, a fact which impressed the novelist Captain Marryat who

¹Godfrey T. Vigne, Six Months in America, as quoted in Charles T. Greve, A Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens, (Chicago, 1904) p. 557

²Greve, Centennial History, p. 558

³"Journal of Cyrus P. Bradley," Ohio State Archeological and Historical Publications XV, (Columbus, 1906), p. 218

considered the society of the city "as good as any in the Union and infinitely more agreeable than some other cities, as in it there was a mixture of Southern frankness of character."⁴ In brief, Cincinnati of the early 1830's was "a city on free soil, yet just across a narrow river from slavery and deriving most of its essential trade from that area; a city where idealism, humanitarianism and the New England conscience were forced into a bitter battle with self-interest; a city where Northern blood predominated in the greater concerns of business and industry, but whose very life seemed to depend on maintenance of friendship with the slave-holding South by tacit condonation of its chief sin."⁵

It is not surprising then, that the Cincinnatians of this period were, in general, anything but friendly toward the abolition movement. On the other hand, we should not be led to believe that there was no anti-slavery sentiment to be found in the city from the very beginning. As proof we call upon the fact that a number of Cincinnatians were in the group that met at Washburne's Tavern in northern Kentucky in 1802 to draw up a comprehensive scheme for gradual emancipation.⁶ With regard to the problem of slavery the opinion of Cincinnati was divided, but with feelings of the majority on the side of anti-abolition, as the evidence would seem to indicate.

The heterogeneity of opinion in Cincinnati is reflected in the votes cast

⁴Greve, Centennial History, p. 561

⁵Alvin F. Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians, (New York, 1950) p. 210

⁶Wilson, p. 754

by the delegates from Hamilton County in the voting on the various "black codes" introduced in the state legislature. These codes were the products of the men from the southern part of the state who felt that their section of the state was the dumping grounds for all the freed Negroes from the South. Their actions were also prompted by fears for the safety of their economic relations with the South which was already protesting the escape of slaves into Ohio.⁷ Although there were people in Cincinnati who were interested in emancipation, it is impossible to deny the attitude evidenced by the votes of their delegates. These votes clearly showed that the people of Cincinnati and Hamilton County did not want free Negroes in their state, nor did they wish to interfere with the institution of slavery in those states where it was sanctioned by local law. Their attitude was well summed up Charles Hammond, editor of the Cincinnati Gazette when he wrote that "the right of property in slaves cannot be questioned or touched by the federal government, or by any state beyond its own territory."⁸

The high water mark of anti-Negro legislation in Ohio was reached with the passage of the Black Code of 1807. The fact that the delegates from Hamilton County voted two to one in favor of the measure indicates that the majority of Cincinnatians were not in favor of freedom for the Negro as it meant an increase in their Negro population. While it is true that a number of Cincinnati people felt that slavery was a great moral and political evil, they also felt that it was a problem which the Southerners had brought upon themselves, and one which should be left to the South to solve. Practical men felt that the

⁷Wilson, p. 754

⁸Cincinnati Gazette, April 11, 1826, p. 2

solution of the slavery problem was none of their business even though their New England consciences told them that it was wrong. Some of them went so far as to say that it was "in the interests of Ohio to have slavery continue in the South for one hundred years. Otherwise our growth will be checked."⁹ This was simply an innocent way of saying that once Ohio had gotten as much as she could out of the South she would be willing to let her conscience have its way with regard to slavery.

The Black Code of 1807 was Ohio's manner of discouraging the settlement of Negroes within her confines. This bill, in its final form, provided that no Negro could settle in Ohio unless he could provide a \$500 bond signed by two white men guaranteeing his good behavior and self-support within twenty days. This was a virtual exclusion for it was ridiculous to think it was possible for any Negro to comply with this provision. In order to placate her Southern buyers, Ohio raised the fine for harboring a fugitive slave from \$50 to \$100, half of which would go to the informer. This part of the bill was definitely meant as an act of friendship toward the South. A third provision of the bill made it illegal for a Negro to testify in a trial in which a white man was involved. This part of the act put the Negro at the complete mercy of the white man, who could rob, beat or kill him with impunity unless other whites could be found to testify against him.

From a study of these black codes, the voting on them, and the Constitution of the State of Ohio, it is safe to conclude that there was unity of belief throughout the state on the abstract theory that there should be no slavery in

⁹Caleb Atwater, History of Ohio, (Cincinnati, 1838) p. 331

Ohio. On the other hand, the efforts to deprive the Negro of his rights show us that the people of Ohio, particularly those in the southern counties, were determined not to interfere in any way with slavery as it existed south of the Ohio River, and the responsibility for raising the Negro to a reasonable cultural level was not to be shuffled off on them if they could prevent it.

Until the abolitionists became active in Ohio, these laws were practically inactive in Cincinnati, but with the coming of the anti-slavery movement the picture changed. Many Cincinnatians considered the movement a curse and a threat to the economic security of the city. The movement was also to prove a threat to the internal peace and order of the Queen City.

In 1829, at the instigation of the abolitionists, a test of the constitutionality of the laws of 1807 was made. When the matter came before the Supreme Court of Ohio, the measure was upheld.¹⁰ Shortly after the verdict was handed down, the city authorities of Cincinnati called upon the Negroes of the city to comply with the provisions of the law requiring them to post a \$500 bond or leave the city. As compliance with the law was an impossibility the only alternative left to the Negroes was exodus. Accordingly they asked for ninety days in which to meet the requirements of the law. They hoped to be able to find a place of refuge in Canada before this time. They were given a stay of sixty days. When the time had expired and it appeared that the Negroes had no intention of posting the required bonds, the only course open to the city officials was to force them to leave the city. When the officials hesitated to

¹⁰Carter G. Woodson, "The Negroes in Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War," Journal of Negro History I, (Washington, 1916), p. 10

do this, a mob quickly formed to relieve them of the task. For three days bands of ruffians roamed the streets, throwing the city into turmoil. The police were unable or unwilling to restore order. Negroes were insulted on the streets attacked in their homes where they had barricaded themselves, and a number of them were killed. When order was finally restored, word came that the Canadian town of Wilberforce would be willing to receive the colored refugees from Cincinnati. It is estimated that more than 1,200 Negroes emigrated from Cincinnati.¹¹ The riot of 1829 was the first to be precipitated by the Negro problem in Cincinnati, but it was not be the last. Once again this riot demonstrated very strongly the unfavorable attitude of the Cincinnatians toward the Negroes and the newly organized abolition movement.

From the very first days of the abolition movement in Cincinnati, the press of that city showed itself most hostile. The reason for this hostility is best summed up in an editorial in the Cincinnati Republican in January, 1836. According to the editor of this paper, the people of Cincinnati wanted nothing to do with the anti-slavery movement because "Southern feeling is too strong in this city, the interests of her Merchants, her Capitalists, and her Tradesmen, are too deeply interwoven with the interests of the Slave States; the commercial and social intercourse between our citizens and the citizens of the southwest are too intimate to admit of the uninterrupted operations of a society tending to separate the ties which connect this city to those states!"¹² Here, as in all other instances where the Cincinnati newspapers attacked the

¹¹Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians, p. 207

¹²Cincinnati Republican, January 22, 1836, p. 2

abolitionists, the attack was not against the theory behind the abolition movement, but rather against its practicality. In other words, the abolition movement was hitting Cincinnati in its pocketbook, and Cincinnati did not like it. Here again we have a reflection of the attitude of the majority of the citizens of Cincinnati toward the problem, namely, slavery is wrong, but it would be prejudicial to the best interests of the city to allow anti-slavery agitation within its confines. We find another expression of this same attitude of mind in a letter to the editor of the Republican which he printed as evidence of the public's undoubted support of his stand.

Mr. Editor - Allow me to ask the people of Cincinnati (I mean those really interested in her prosperity) through the medium of your paper, if they do not intend at this time, to give so decided an expression of their sentiments as regards abolition, that those who are injuring the character and prospects of this city, may know and feel that this is not the place for them. Will they permit a band of fanatics, led on by an English emissary, to make this the theater of their operation, from whence they may throw firebrands in the slave states, that will kindle a fire that will not be quenched till this glorious Union shall be dissolved, and the blood of the innocent - women and children - cry for vengeance.¹³

The antagonism shown by the Republican toward the abolition cause was true also of the Cincinnati Whig, especially in its fight against the abolition newspaper the Philanthropist.

It would be untrue, however, to state that the attitude assumed by the above mentioned papers was the attitude adopted by all the newspapers of the city. About this time young Henry Ward Beecher, then a student at Lane Seminary, was acting editor of the Cincinnati Journal. In his editorials we find many

¹³Cincinnati Republican, July 21, 1836, p. 2

scathing indictments of slavery. His sister Harriet also wrote for his paper, "satirizing the anti-abolitionist mode of thought."¹⁴

On other newspaper in Cincinnati refused to join in the attack on the abolitionists. This was the Cincinnati Gazette, the leading commercial paper of the city. It was edited by Charles Hammond, "an able lawyer, a forcible writer, and a man of influence."¹⁵ However, Mr. Hammond's refusal to join in the anti-abolitionist crusade conducted by the other papers is not to be construed as an approval of the movement. On the contrary, Hammond "approved the Ohio laws that oppressed the blacks, believed in giving up fugitive slaves, and thought the abolitionists mistaken and fanatical."¹⁶ His reason for refusing to join this fight against the abolitionists was based on his very decided opinions on the freedom of the press and speech, the right of petition, and resistance to the encroachments of the slave states on the rights of the free states. He denounced his fellow editors for their attacks on the abolitionists which he felt were attacks on free speech and freedom of the press. If the abolitionists wanted to publish a paper in Cincinnati and promote their cause through lectures, that was their right, and a refusal of that right would be an act contrary to the principles upon which our country was founded. In one of his editorials Hammond wrote: "In respect to the anti-slavery and abolition movements, the Editor of the Gazette is in a singular position. He is opposed to the movements of these societies, and considers

¹⁴Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians, p. 213

¹⁵William G. Birney, James G. Birney and His Times: The Genesis of the Republican Party with Some Account of Abolition in the South before 1828, (New York, 1890) p. 205

¹⁶Ibid., p. 205

their course as violative of the domestic rights of the owners of slaves - an offensive intrusion into the household sanctuary of their fellow citizens. On the other hand, he cannot be reconciled to the position that a muzzle should be placed on any freeman, in respect to discussion of what must be admitted to involve a question of human rights."¹⁷ Mr. Hammond was tolerant of the abolitionists not because he favored their doctrines, but because he was so strong an advocate of free speech which was being denied to these anti-slavery agitators. It was not until the passage of the fugitive slave law in 1850 that the Gazette became friendly to the Negro and the antislavery cause.

The opinions voiced in the columns of the Cincinnati newspapers were merely reflections of the opinions held by the leading citizens of the city toward the anti-slavery movement. From the first, the majority of those who possessed money and property in Cincinnati were in violent opposition to the work of the abolitionists. As has been pointed out previously, their opposition was founded on the fear that the abolitionists working in Cincinnati would tend to weaken the commercial ties between the South and Cincinnati businessmen. Illustrative of the attitude maintained by the vested interests of Cincinnati was their constant and whole-hearted support of discussions and movements which tended to discredit the anti-slavery crusade. In 1839 we find such prominent men as Judge J. Burnet, Daniel Gano and Jesse Justice calling attention to a series of lectures whose object was "to bring the doctrine of the American Anti-Slavery Society to the test of Scripture, of Justice, of Experience and of the Constitution of the United States."¹⁸ Endorsement of

¹⁷Cincinnati Gazette, January 22, 1836, p. 2

¹⁸Cincinnati Gazette, January 12, 1839, p. 1

these lectures by these political and business leaders of the city was calculated to produce full conviction in the minds of the average citizens of Cincinnati of the truth of the doctrine put forward, namely, the futility of any interference with the institution of slavery.¹⁹

Another example of active opposition by men of wealth to the abolitionists was shown in the Abhorrence Meeting called in March, 1839 to show the hostile attitude of the people to the doctrines of the abolitionists. The principal speaker at this meeting was General Robert T. Lytle, one of Cincinnati's most prominent property-holders, who offered a number of resolutions to the effect that "the colonization plan was the only sure and safe and feasible project to avoid the ills of slavery and the abolitionists were pursuing a course calculated to prevent all amelioration of the condition of the colored race."²⁰

In an effort to forestall the work of the abolitionists, some of the more outstanding citizens formed a branch of the American Colonization Society for Hamilton County. Since the work of this society was in direct opposition to the work of the American Anti-Slavery Society and was heartily endorsed by the slaveholders of the South, the organization of this branch served a twofold purpose. It would act as an organized counteragent to the work of the abolition agitators, and its backing by so many prominent business and social leaders would be an indication to the South that Cincinnati business and capital were in opposition to the anti-slavery movement.

Rufus King, one of Cincinnati's ablest lawyers, writing many years after

¹⁹Greve, Centennial History, p. 749

²⁰Ibid.

the whole question of slavery had been settled by the Civil War, gave voice to the antebellum opinion of most of the leading business and professional men of Cincinnati. As King saw it, "the abolitionists had become fanatical and lawless in their delirium of conscience, while rioters and mobs took equal pleasure in affording them opportunities for martyrdom."²¹ As a result, both the internal and external security of the city was threatened. Even those Cincinnatians who disapproved of the principle of slavery were furious at the activities of the anti-slavery men, in that they insisted upon upsetting the status quo. In the Cincinnati of the 1830's there were too many men of wealth and culture whose actions and thoughts were governed by their pocketbooks rather than by their consciences. Convinced, for the most part, that slavery in itself was wrong, they were content to countenance its continued existence since their fortunes depended upon it.

Perhaps the most outstanding instance of the hostility existing between the opposing schools of opinion represented by the abolitionists and the men of substance in Cincinnati is to be found in the repeated attacks on the Philanthropist, the abolition newspaper. A meeting protesting the publication of the newspaper was held on January 22, 1836, at which the cream of Cincinnati society was well represented. Among those who attended were the much respected Mayor of Cincinnati, Samuel W. Davis; Judge William Burke, clergyman and city postmaster; Judge Jacob Burnet, former United States Senator and member of the Ohio Supreme Court; Morgan Neville, receiver of the Land Office

²¹Rufus King, Ohio: First Fruits of the Ordinance of 1787, as quoted in Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians, p. 209

for the district; and Rev. Oliver M. Spencer, wealthy preacher-banker.²² This meeting passed a series of resolutions deploring the abolitionist agitation in the city with an eye toward convincing the South that the best thought in Cincinnati respected the rights of the slaveholder. The resolutions are known to history as the Cincinnati Preamble and Resolutions.²³

In these resolutions the abolitionists are characterized as "enemies of the happiness of the people and to the peace and prosperity of the state." These "deluded" men are warned of "the odium they are creating, and of the danger they are incurring in perserving in their weak and vain struggles for an object impracticable and unattainable." In the Preamble to this document, its framers tell the world that they are prompted to take this action against the abolitionists because

The imprudence, the immorality, the wickedness of this course are already affecting our social relations, jeopardizing our internal commerce, and throwing obstacles in the way of those great contemplated schemes of improvement by which the enlightened men of the different States are struggling to draw closer the bonds of brotherly feeling and social inter-communication. The case has become alarming; in this emergency it behoves the temperate and prudent among us, who appreciate the value of our glorious Union to take some direct action on the subject; otherwise we may expect some evil spirit to arise, to overcloud our brilliant perspective, by dashing the cup of harmony to pieces. The urgency applies particularly to Cincinnati, inasmuch as a few misguided men have recently made it the theatre for disseminating doctrines and sentiments entirely at variance with the views and feelings of the great mass of our population.²⁴

Moreover, the meeting held that the doctrines of the abolitionists were

²²Cincinnati Gazette, January 25, 1836, p.3

²³An entire account of the meeting and a complete text of the Cincinnati Preamble and Resolutions are to be found in the Cincinnati Gazette, Jan. 25, 1836

²⁴Cincinnati Gazette, January 25, 1836, p. 3

"treasonable and revolutionary" and as such they should be "discountenanced by all good and patriotic citizens." This document is a clear-cut statement of the stand taken by the vast majority of the leaders of Cincinnati's business, industry and professions. As such it leaves no doubt as to the ardent hostility entertained by these men toward the cause of the abolitionists.

Again it would be wrong to generalize and say that because the large majority of the prominent members of Cincinnati society were hostile to the anti-slavery movement, all important men in the community shared this feeling. This is not true. One needs only to look at the roster of those who supported the actions of the American Anti-Slavery Society for proof of this. There we find such names as Salmon P. Chase, attorney, who was to be governor of Ohio, member of Lincoln's cabinet, and justice of the Supreme Court; Thomas Morris, attorney and United States Senator; Dr. Gamiliel Bailey, professor and editor; James Ludlow, son of one of the city's founders; Nicholas Longworth, Cincinnati business man and the city's wealthiest man and most extensive property-holder; and Rutherford Hayes, future president of the United States. Nor are we to be led to suppose that all the business men of the city allowed themselves to be guided in this matter by the dictates of their Southern customers. In 1842 a paper known as the Anti-Abolitionist published a list of Cincinnati business men who were known abolitionists for the purpose of informing Southerners and enabling them to avoid trading with these people.²⁵ In 1841 a protest meeting against the slave trade in the District of Columbia had been held under the leadership of three prominent business men, Samuel Lewis, D.F. Meader, and

²⁵Greve, Centennial History, p. 752

W.T. Truman, all of whom suffered financial losses because of their anti-slavery activities.²⁶

One other indication of the hostility with which the abolitionists met in Cincinnati was the frequency with which the anti-slavery leaders were mobbed by the citizens of the city.²⁷ As late as 1862, when Wendell Philips attempted to lecture at the Opera House in Cincinnati, he was met by a howling mob which pelted him with stones and rotten eggs, and he barely escaped hanging at their hands.²⁸ Yet this same city permitted William L. Yancey, the Alabama firebrand, "to utter the most bitter disloyal tirade, with threats against the North, without a whisper of dissent from an audience of three thousand."²⁹

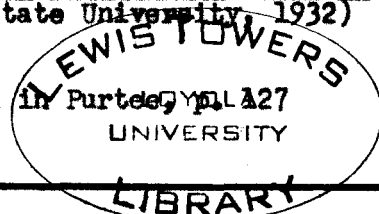
For the most part, the various religious groups of Cincinnati did not entirely agree with the attitude toward the slavery problem adopted by the powerful and influential citizens of that city. One interesting indication of this is to be found in the records of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati which met at Chillicothe in October, 1836. On October 21, a complaint was lodged with the Synod by a certain member of the Cincinnati Presbytery against an act previous passed by that Presbytery to the effect that it was improper to put questions on the subject of slavery to candidates for the ministry. The complaint was made because of the appointment of Rev.

²⁶Greve, Centennial History, p. 750

²⁷Edward O. Purtee, "The Underground Railroad from Southwestern Ohio to Lake Erie, unpublished Doctor's Dissertation (Ohio State University, 1932) p. 127

²⁸Anti-Slavery Standard, April 5, 1862 as found in Purtee, p. 127

²⁹Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians, p. 213



J.C. Harrison, a slaveholder, to the Church of Round Bottom. It was referred to the consideration of a committee which gave the following report. "The Committee have attentively considered the subject committed to them. They have reviewed the action of the Synod at its last meeting on the subject of slave-holding ministers, and seeing nothing, which in their opinion should be changed, that Synod has declared slave-holding to be a sin, and your committee presumes, will ever hold it as a crime of deep dye, one which threatens the destruction of the nation allowing it and the church conniving at it."³⁰

The Synod then went on to pass a series of resolutions in which the exclusion of slaveholders from the church was ordered and a petition to the United States Congress urging the abolition of slavery within the confines of the District of Columbia was proposed. It was also proposed to petition "the next General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, to enjoin on all the presbyteries and church sessions under their care, to exclude from the communion of the church all persons who shall claim the right of property in their fellow men."³¹ These resolutions were unanimously adopted and a committee was appointed to draw up a memorial that would be forwarded to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church which was to meet in Philadelphia the following May. In the memorial, slavery is condemned as being contrary to the law of God and the natural law. The Synod asked that all those who in any way countenance slavery or aided in its continuation be cut off from the Church.³²

³⁰Cincinnati Journal, December 10, 1836, p. 2

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

The Presbyterians were not alone in their opposition to the institution of slavery. From the very first, the Quakers, with their emphasis on the virtue of brotherly love, were opposed to slavery and they were to remain so till its extinction. However, the very nature of their religious belief denied them the outspokenness of the Presbyterians, and it was as conductors on the Underground Railroad that they were to show their opposition in a more active way, by aiding fugitive slaves to escape from their masters.

At first, the Methodists of the city were hesitant and uncertain as to what position on the slavery question they should adopt. In their annual meeting at Chillicothe in 1812, they had ruled that no member of their persuasion could purchase slaves except in the case of mercy or with the intention of manumitting the unfortunate. If one of their members did purchase a slave for one of the above reasons he might hold the slave for a period of service long enough to compensate the buyer for his purchase. However, all of this was to be done only with the approval of and under the supervision of the church.³³ When the organized abolition movement came to Cincinnati, the Methodists, worried over the possible reaction of that sensitive community, repudiated the movement and censured two of the members who had been lecturing on the subject. In a resolution passed at this time they warned the members of their church against any action "calculated to bring on this body the suspicions and distrust of the community, and misrepresent its sentiments with regard to the point at issue."³⁴ In the same set of resolutions the citizens

³³Thomas Conry, S.J., "Ohio Churches and Abolitionism," Historical Bulletin XXXI, (St. Louis, 1952) p. 12

³⁴Western Christian Advocate, May 20, 1836 as quoted in Conry, p. 12

of Cincinnati were informed that the Methodists "are decidedly apposed to modern abolition and wholly disdain any right, wish or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation between master and slave as it exists in the slave-holding states of the Union."³⁵

The Cincinnati Catholics of the time were too busily engaged with other problems to concern themselves too deeply with the problem of the Negro slaves. They were not, however, altogether indifferent and silent. Their attitude as it is found in the columns of the Catholic Telegraph, the official organ of diocese, was one of opposition to slavery but lacking in sympathy for the cause of the abolitionists. This lack of sympathy can in large measure be attributed to the fact, that, for the most part, the abolition agitators frequently showed strong nativist sentiments, and the Catholics naturally mistrusted them. The Catholic Telegraph did publish a strong denunciation of the slave trade and rejoiced "that the world is waking up to the horrors, religious, social and political of Negro slavery."³⁶

The German Catholic weekly, Wahreitsfreund, published in Cincinnati, devoted little space to discussion of the problem. In its August 17, 1837 issue it did warn the German Catholics of the city to remember that even though every Christian hated slavery, it did not mean that he took part in riots brought on by the problem.³⁷ In a later issue the editor of this paper definitely came out against the cause of abolition in an editorial in which he found fault with

³⁵Conry, p. 12

³⁶Catholic Telegraph, May 16, 1840 as quoted in Conry, p. 15

³⁷Der Wahreitsfreund, August 17, 1837

the abolitionists for setting themselves above the existing laws and letting their emotions obscure the right of ownership. "We, too, want abolition," he wrote, "but not by way of disregarding established rights."³⁸ He went on to defend the seeming indifference of Catholics on the issue by saying: "The Church condemns slavery, but where she cannot abrogate it, instead of pouring oil on the fire, she preaches gentleness and mercy to the master and tries to elevate the slave by instruction, divine worship, and the sacraments."³⁹

We have it on the testimony of one of the abolitionists of the day that the bishop of Cincinnati, Bishop Purcell, looked with favor on the work of the abolitionists. Commenting on the destruction of his father's newspaper by a Cincinnati mob, William Birney is very definite in his insistence that no Irish Catholics took part in the riot, and adds in a footnote, "Bishop Purcell, afterwards archbishop, was an Irish Catholic and favored anti-slavery opinions. His younger brother, a priest and an able man, was an abolitionist of the O'Connell type."⁴⁰ It definitely was Archbishop Purcell's wish that all men, regardless of color should enjoy the benefits of personal freedom, for he was to write, "The Catholic Church has always been a friend of human liberty, just as it was the task of Christ to set men free. He who tries to perpetuate slavery disrespects the doctrine and example of Christ."⁴¹

³⁸Der Wahrheitsfreund, April 20, 1854

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Birney, James G. Birney, p. 249. In connection with this note it should be pointed out that Birney himself was Irish, and while not a Catholic he had attended St. Xavier College for part of his education. Consequently, his statement here may not be altogether free from the coloring of prejudice.

⁴¹Der Wahrheitsfreund, November 11, 1863

Thus we see that the attitude of Cincinnatians in general toward the abolitionists was one of open hostility. Most of the citizens discountenanced the institution of slavery but were willing to wink at its continuance in the South for financial reasons. The moneyed class and the press it controled were against the work of the abolitionists, and because they were the leaders of the city and the moulders of public opinion, the average citizen, in general, followed their lead. The frequency of race and anti-abolition riots in the city are indicative of this. On the other had, the abolitionists did find supporters among the wealthy and influential just as they did among the workers and tradesmen of less importance as well as from religious men who followed their consciences rather than expediency.

CHAPTER III

THE WORK OF THEODORE D. WELD: LANE SEMINARY

It is a strange fact that one of the most prominent of the abolitionists has remained, until recent times, unknown and neglected in the pages of American History. This man was Theodore Dwight Weld. No doubt his anonymity is due in large part to his almost morbid sense of modesty. He was one of the most important guiding figures of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and yet he would accept no office, attended no conventions, published nothing under his own name, and would allow none of his speeches or letters to be published. But when one considers the work that he did and the influence that he wielded in the anti-slavery movement, there can be no doubt that Professor Gilbert Barnes was correct when he wrote: "Measured by his influence, Weld was not only the greatest of the abolitionists; he was also one of the greatest figures of his time."¹ In the West, Weld, eloquent as an angel and powerful as thunder, accomplished more than all the other abolitionist combined, with the possible exception of James G. Birney. A study of the abolition movement in Ohio, in Western Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts shows that the anti-slavery areas in the West and the field of Weld's labors largely coincide. However, we

¹Gilbert H. Barnes, "Theodore D. Weld," Dictionary of American Biography XIX, (New York, 1943), p. 626

rest content with confining our study of Weld's work to the period of his labors in Cincinnati, especially those carried on in connection with the students of Lane Theological Seminary. In the light of its results, Weld's conversion of Lane Seminary to the anti-slavery cause was, without doubt, his greatest accomplishment for the cause in the West.

Theodore Weld was born in Connecticut, the son of Ludovicus and Elizabeth Clarke Weld. His early youth was spent near Utica, New York, where his father labored as a Congregationalist minister. As a young man he came under the influence of Captain Charles Stuart, a retired English army officer, and an ardent abolitionist. The influence that this gentleman exercised over young Weld was an important factor in the shaping of the young man's views on slavery and in his subsequent choice of a career in the service of the abolitionist cause. While a student at Philips Andover Academy, young Theodore almost went blind because of his intense application to study. As a result, he was forced to leave the school, and, recalling some lectures he had once heard on the science of mnemonics, he decided to support himself by giving lectures on this subject. This he did for three years, touring Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. On this tour through the South, he was able to observe slavery at first hand, and this resulted in his becoming a confirmed foe of the institution. At the age of 21, Weld returned to New York, where he was persuaded to enter Hamilton College, located near Utica.

While a student in Utica, he came into contact with Charles C. Finney the great revivalist. At first, he was enraged by Finney's methods, considering them more as circus clowning than religion. He declared that Finney was not a minister of the gospel and began a campaign in opposition to Finney's re-

vivals.² The fact that Finney was not only able to answer Weld's objections and convert him, but even enlisted the young man as a member of his "Holy Band" of evangelists, is a testimony to Finney's extraordinary powers of persuasion.

In 1831, Weld was persuaded to accept an agency for the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions organized by Arthur and Lewis Tappan, the New York merchants and philanthropists, who sought to promote higher education in the West on the manual labor plan. Along with this agency Weld had accepted a commission from the Tappan brothers to select a site for a "great national Theological Seminary on the Manual Labor Plan."³ Weld's travels on behalf of the Society carried him through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Alabama and Tennessee. He lectured on manual labor, temperance, and wherever he went he constantly agitated against slavery. It was during these travels that he converted a number of men who were to play prominent roles in the future American Anti-Slavery Society, among whom were James G. Birney, and Doctor Allen of Alabama, both of whom were slave-holders; Rev. John Keep, Elizur Wright and Beriah Green, all members of the faculty of Western Reserve University. Elizur Wright was to become secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, and one of its ablest administrators.

But the most significant outcome of Weld's travels was his selection of a site on which to build the proposed theological seminary. He had considered sites in northern New York state in the section known as "Little Greece," but conditions there were not favorable to the project. One of his converts wrote

²Walter R. Kaegy, "The Lane Seminary Rebellion," Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio Bulletin, IX (Cincinnati, 1951) p. 147

³Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 39

to him asking him to consider Cincinnati as a possible site, for he felt "sanguine in the belief that if you would come over and view the land in its length and breathe, bearing upon its surface the germ of a mighty, an all controlling influence, both political and religious, you would at once be in favor of locating the great institution in the Valley of the Mississippi...You are well aware of the fact that this western country is soon to be a mighty giant that shall wield not only the destinies of our own country, but of the world... I hope and pray that you will not take any decisive step until you come to Cincinnati and see for yourself."⁴ Weld heeded the advice and on his way south in 1832, he visited Cincinnati.

By coincidence a site for a theological seminary was already available in Cincinnati. In 1829 two New Orleans' merchants named Lane had donated a tract of land in the Walnut Hills section of Cincinnati for a seminary campus. This seminary was chartered by the Ohio Legislature under the name of Lane Seminary on February 11, 1829.⁵ In 1830 the Rev. F.Y. Vail was appointed agent for the project. One of the first acts of the Rev. Mr. Vail was to apply to Arthur Tappan for an endowment, and though he got no money at this time, he did succeed in arousing Mr. Tappan's interest. In a year's time he again applied to Mr. Tappan for financial assistance. Tappan, who by this time was pledged to finance a theological seminary, in turn referred him to Theodore Weld who was acting as his agent in this matter. In a letter to Weld, Vail pleaded the cause of Cincinnati as a site for the seminary that the Tappans and Weld had in mind.

⁴J.L. Tracy to Weld, November 24, 1831, Weld-Grimké Letters, I, p. 57

⁵Greve, Centennial History, p. 619

"You ought not to fix your mind upon a location for this institution," he wrote, "until you have paid a visit to this great valley, and have conferred with some brethren who have been looking over the rising millions of the West with a view of raising up just such an institution as you wish."⁶ Weld visited the Walnut Hills location, was charmed by it, and reported favorable on Lane Seminary for the national manual labor institution. Weld's report was approved, and the Tappans pledged a handsome endowment. Work on the seminary was begun sometime in March, 1832.⁷

For president of the new seminary Tappan had selected the famous Lyman Beecher, and in the face of New England's protest, had induced him to accept the post. Perhaps the biggest factor behind Beecher's acceptance of this post was that he saw in Lane Seminary the Presbyterian answer to the growing supremacy of the Catholic Church in the West. |

Beecher was, and was not, in sympathy with the anti-slavery movement. There were some features of the movement which did not appeal to him, and yet he was by nature and habit a reformer. The plan of the colonizationists had appealed to him more than the principles of the abolitionists, and when a choice between the two had to be made, he chose colonization. When Garrison came out against colonization, Beecher proposed a plan of assimilation for abolitionist and colonizationist. His plan was simple: "Let the abolitionist press abolition and not seek to destroy the colonizationist; and the colonizationist, let him press still harder for colonization...Let there be harmony and love and

⁶F.Y. Vail to Weld, November, 1831, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 58

⁷Henry B. Stanton to Weld, March 7, 1832, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 71

benevolence after this sort, and who need care for nullification or tariff or abolition in opposition to colonization?"⁸ The very natures of the conflicting programs proposed by the abolitionists and the colonizationists made this plan impossible. His years as president of Lane Seminary made him tolerant, even sympathetic of the movement with which, in years to come, the members of his family, especially Henry Ward and Harriet, were so prominently identified. It was the extreme phase of agitation that he mistrusted. He said that he was never one of those "he goat men, who think that they do God service by butting everything in the line of their march, which does not fall in or get out of their way."⁹ However, this hint of opposition to the abolition movement on the part of Beecher was a source of embarrassment to Tappan and Weld who already had come to an understanding with the abolition leaders of the East that Lane was to serve not only as a seminary of New School Presbyterianism, free from the hide-bound orthodoxy of the East, but also as a forum for abolition propaganda.¹⁰

Meanwhile, young men had begun to arrive in Cincinnati to begin their studies at Lane. Most of them were from New York state, the fruits of Finney's revivals. Mixed with them were a number of Weld's converts from the South, including one Negro, James Bradley, who had bought his freedom from slavery with the earnings of his own hands. This student body was hardly what one would call a group of young and inexperienced men. The maturity, experience and intellectual acumen of the students was attested by Weld in a letter to the

⁸Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 45

⁹Edward Tarwell Hayward, Lyman Beecher, (Boston, 1904) p. 75

¹⁰Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 45

editor of the Western Monthly Magazine.

Thirty of the theological class are over twenty-six years old, fourteen are over twenty-eight, and nine are between thirty and thirty-five. Two of the class were members of colleges seventeen years ago; two others were graduated eight years since; and the remainder have either graduated more recently, or have gone through a course of study substantially equal to a college course. One of the class was a practicing physician, for ten years; twelve other have been public agents for state and national benevolent institutions, employed in public lecturing, in various parts of the Union. Six of the class are married men; three of them have been so for nearly ten years.¹¹

Beecher himself looked on them with pride as the "most talented, spirited, heroic phalanx I have ever seen."¹²

When Weld entered Lane Seminary as a student he was the only man there with forthright abolitionist convictions. True it was that there were many of the group with anti-slavery convictions, but, like their illustrious president, they favored the method of dealing with the problem proposed by the advocates of colonization. As one of their number put it, several years later, "I suppose there was a general consent that slavery was somehow wrong and to be got rid of. There was not a readiness to pronounce it sin."¹³ However, under the influence of Weld, who, according to Beecher, "took the lead of the whole institution,"¹⁴ and in such an environment as Cincinnati in 1833, it was not long until this remarkable group was brought to grips with the problems of slavery and abolition.

¹¹Weld to James Hall, March 29, 1834, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 138

¹²Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 46

¹³Benjamin J. Thomas, Theodore Weld, Crusader for Freedom, (New Brunswick, 1950), p. 70

¹⁴Charles E. Beecher, Autobiography, Correspondence, etc., of Lyman Beecher, (New York, 1864) II, p. 326

Shortly after he entered Lane as a student, Weld was invited to take part in the convention being held in Philadelphia for the purpose of putting some system and organization into the work being carried on by the various local and state anti-slavery societies. Unable to attend the convention, Weld sent a letter to the organizational committee in which he set forth in no uncertain language the exact position he held on the matter proposed for discussion, namely, what policy should be adopted by all the abolitionists.

My whole heart is with you, but a physical impossibility prevents my personal attendance...You request me, if unable to attend to transmit to you an expression of my views on the general subject. I say then: God has committed to every moral agent the privilege, the right, and the responsibility of personal ownership. This is God's plan. Slavery annihilates it, and surrenders to avarice, passion and lust, all that makes life a blessing. It crushes the body, tramples into the dust the upward tendencies of the intellect, breaks the heart and kills the soul. Therefore, I am deliberately, earnestly, solemnly and with my whole heart and soul and mind and strength, for the immediate, universal and total abolition of slavery.¹⁵

As was related previously, the American Anti-Slavery Society was born at this convention, and a program of agitation for immediate emancipation was adopted by the delegates. Elizur Wright, writing to Weld, gave an account of the convention, and asked Weld to accept a commission as an agent for the society, since the one thing that was then most needed was public recognition and support. Agents were the answer to the problem of how to bring the aims and methods of the society before the public eye, and these agents must be men "who will electrify the mass wherever they move, — and they must move on no

¹⁵Weld to Arthur Tappan, Joshua Leavitt, and Elizur Wright, November 22, 1833, Weld-Grimke Letters, p. 120

small scale."¹⁶ Weld readily accepted the proffered agency and soon was in possession of a commission from the American Anti-Slavery Society appointing him "as their agent, for the space of one year commencing with the first day of January, 1834, in the State of Ohio and elsewhere as the Committee may direct."¹⁷ Accompanying the commission was a list of particular instructions as to the aim, principles, and methods that the society wished its agents to pursue in their agency. In these instructions Weld was told: "You will inculcate everywhere, the great fundamental principle of Immediate Abolition, as the duty of all masters, on the ground that slavery is both unjust and unprofitable. Insist principally on the SIN OF SLAVERY, because our main hope is in the consciences of men, and it requires logic to prove that it is always safe to do right...We reprobate the idea of compensation to the slave-holder, because it implies the right of slavery...We also reprobate all plans of expatriation, by whatever specious pretences covered, as a remedy for slavery, for they all proceed from prejudice against color."¹⁸

Weld lost little time in carrying out the mandates of his commission. As was to be expected he first preached the gospel of immediate emancipation among his fellow students. It was a difficult enterprise at first, for most of the students looked on the doctrines of the abolitionists as the "climax of

¹⁶Elizur Wright to Weld, December 31, 1833, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 121

¹⁷American Anti-Slavery Society Commission to Theodore Weld, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 124

¹⁸Particular Instructions of the American Anti-Slavery Society to Theodore Weld, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 121

absurdity, fanaticism and blood."¹⁹ Undaunted at the lack of response on the part of his fellows at Lane, Weld persisted in his efforts to win these men to the abolition cause. At last, worn down by his persistence, the Lane students began to consider his arguments seriously, and converts were made. The first of these was William T. Allan, "an individual of great sway among the students, who was from Alabama; born, bred and educated in the midst of slavery."²⁰ Weld had labored long with this young man in an effort to convince him of the sinfulness of slavery. The arguments he had advanced had been convincing and "after some weeks of inquiry, and struggling with conscience, his noble soul broke loose from its shackles."²¹ Weld continued his proselytizing among the students in a quiet manner until he had a group of converts large enough and well enough organized to begin a large scale campaign. Weld's plan was to have each of his converts in turn chose a fellow student whom he was to instruct, convince and enlist in the cause.

By February 1834, interest in the abolition movement had become so intense among the seminary students that it was decided to hold a public debate at the Seminary between the advocates of immediate emancipation and those who favored the program of the colonizationists. The students applied to president Beecher for permission to hold the discussion. Beecher in a moment of thoughtless enthusiasm not only endorsed the proceedings, but even agreed to participate in them. On second thought, and after consultation with the members of the

¹⁹Weld to Lewis Tappan, March 18, 1834, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 132

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

faculty on the subject, he deemed it inadvisable to attend the discussion. Instead, he sent his youngest daughter Catherine to represent him.

This public discussion of slavery, since known as the Lane Debates, continued for eighteen nights. It was a debate in name only. In substance it was a protracted revival meeting. Despite the inflammatory nature of the subject under discussion, the meeting was marked by prayerful investigation of the various problems and proposed remedies. "There had been no struggling, no quibbling, no striving to evade the truth," wrote one unnamed student, "but on the other hand candor, fairness and manhood have characterized the debate."²² There were no invectives or denunciations hurled, even though eighteen of the participants came from slave-holding families and one was a slave-holder himself.

The Debate began with a discussion of the question, "Ought the people of the slave-holding states to abolish slavery immediately?" Weld opened the inquiry and held forth for two nights. He presented immediate abolition as the remedy for the problem of slavery, explaining immediatism according to the New York Committee's interpretation. "By immediate emancipation we do not mean that the slaves shall be turned loose upon the nation nor that they shall be instantly vested with political rights and privileges."²³ What was meant by the term immediatism was "gradual emancipation, immediately begun."

For the next seven nights testimonies were given as to the inherent cruelties of slavery as it was practiced in the South. It is notable that these

²²Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 66

²³Ibid.

testimonies were principally those of the Southern students and were based on personal observations. William Allen, Weld's first convert, described slavery as he had witnessed it in operation in Alabama. Asa Stone, a student who had been a teacher in Mississippi, described what he had seen there. James A. Thome, a native of Kentucky, told how slavery in that state tended to degrade the planters' sons and demoralize society in general. Huntington Lyman described slavery in Louisiana. One of the most devastating testimonies was that of James Bradley, a colored man, who had the audience in tears as he described how he was kidnapped and brought to the United States on a slave ship as a child, sold to a North Carolina planter, who allowed him to work out his freedom.²⁴ Other witnesses described the internal slave trade, concerning which all those in the audience from the border states had personal knowledge. Weld then closed the question of immediate abolition. His closing speech was thus described by one of the participants. "He...uttered no malice; sharpened no phrase so that its venomous point might rankle in another's breast...His great soul was full of compassion for the oppressor and the oppressed...Nobly simple in manner, free from the thought of self, he touched the springs of the human heart."²⁵

On the ninth evening, a vote was taken, and all except four or five students who had not as yet formed an opinion, voted for immediate abolition.

The remaining nine nights were given over to a discussion of the question: "Was the American Colonization Society such as to entitle it to the patronage

²⁴Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 71

²⁵Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 67

of the Christian Community?" The students tried to be impartial in their investigations, but their previous vote had made the outcome of the discussion a foregone conclusion. As H.B. Stanton, one of the participants wrote, "The students now considered the Colonization Society not like blinded partisans, but like men whose polar star was fact and truth, whose needle was conscience, whose chart was the Bible."²⁶ During this period of the discussion, Catherine Beecher presented her father's plan of assimilation for the abolitionists and the colonizationists, "which attempted to prove that colonizationists and abolitionists ought to unite their efforts and not contend against one another."²⁷ The students gave the plan a respectful hearing and its points were answered one by one to the complete satisfaction of the listeners. But no one defended it. The students also examined the complete files of the African Repository, the official organ of the colonizationists, and a number of pamphlets sent them by the Cincinnati colonizationists. They also listened to a speech of a gentleman from Cincinnati who had visited Liberia. In the end all this material was condemned by the students. On the last evening another vote was taken and the plans of the colonizationists were almost unanimously voted down. The students of Lane Seminary then proceeded to organize an anti-slavery society. Weld wrote to Lewis Tappan, "The Lord had done great things for us here."²⁸

The converted seminarians were not content merely to change their opinions

²⁶Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 66

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Weld to Lewis Tappan, March 18, 1834, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 132

on the question of what should be done about slavery. They sought ways of putting their convictions into action. As Weld wrote: "We believe that faith without works is dead."²⁹ They began by engaging directly in an organized effort to better the condition of the Negroes living in and around Cincinnati. They subscribed funds in order to set up a library and reading room for the Negroes of the city. The students established Sunday-schools in various parts of the city, conducted evening classes for the education of adults, organized a Lyceum in which they held lectures on useful subjects, and visited the Negroes in their homes. One of the students, Augustus Wattles, requested permission from Beecher to leave the seminary to devote his life to educating the poor blacks of city. The permission was reluctantly granted, the school established and it was soon so swamped with pupils that another student, Marius Robinson of Tennessee, was persuaded to leave his studies and join Wattles.³⁰

These activities of the Lane seminarians were not well received by the people of Cincinnati. Mention has already been made of the intimate ties then existing between the city and the South, and the race-consciousness of the community that had resulted in a violent riot only five years before. One magazine published in Cincinnati, the Western Monthly Magazine, described the Lane Debate and the subsequent actions of the students as the carrying-on of "precocious undergraduates," embryo clergymen," and "a set of young gentlemen dreaming themselves into full-grown patriots," who are "setting seriously to work to alter the constitution of their country." Weld was pictured as a "cunning

²⁹Weld to Lewis Tappan, March 18, 1834, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 132

³⁰Ibid.

agent" employed "to work upon the sympathies of these young gentlemen - enlist the prejudices and prepare them to divulge the doctrines of his party." His work was summed up as "a cunningly devised scheme which would be creditable to the ingenuity of a college of jesuits."³¹

Ugly rumors were circulated throughout the city about the social relations between the students and the Negroes. The actions of some of the seminarians, though innocent, tended to give substance to these tales. Wattles boarded with a colored family, and at times the student teachers would stay overnight in the homes of Negroes. A number of colored girls came out to the seminary in a carriage to interview their instructors and one of the students was seen on the street with a Negress. These actions stirred up feelings of race repugnance in the citizens of Cincinnati and resentful rumblings were heard throughout the city. "Cincinnati was never so convulsed before," remarked a trustee of the institution.³² Violence seemed on the verge of breaking out, but it was avoided for the moment by the advent of the summer vacation and the scattering of the faculty and student body.

It was not only in Cincinnati that the Lane Debates created a furor, but also in the East. A group of college presidents and representatives meeting in the East, hoping to forestall any similar discussions in the colleges under their care, "unanimously agreed that the times imperiously demanded that all

³¹Western Monthly Magazine, II, May 1834, "Education and Slavery: An Essay on the Preamble and Constitution of the Anti-Slavery Society of — Seminary." p. 266. A lengthy refutation of this attack was submitted by Weld to the editor of the Cincinnati Journal. It may be found under the heading, Weld to James Hall, editor of the Western Monthly Magazine, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 132

³²Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 70

anti-slavery agitation be suppressed."³³ A copy of this resolution was sent to every college in the country, and when the Executive Committee of the Lane Board of Trustees received their copy, it was decided that the time had come to correct the students who were the cause of all this unfavorable publicity.

The moving spirit behind this action of the Board of Trustees was the unloved professor of Church History, Professor Briggs. Moreover, fifteen of the twenty-six trustees were business or professional men who had dealings with the South, and if pressure had not already been brought to bear on them by their Southern customers, they well knew that it soon would be.³⁴ To have the abolition label placed on the seminary would be disastrous to their business interests.

The Executive Committee called a special meeting on August 20, 1834, at which time they decided that slavery was no subject for discussion by immature minds. Consequently, they recommended: "That the student's anti-slavery society should be abolished; that 'any public meetings or discussions among the students, or any public addresses by the students in the seminary or elsewhere, or any appeals or communications to the students at their meals or when

³³Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 71

³⁴Seven of the board were ministers, Rev. James Gallaher, Rev. F.Y. Vail, Rev. A. Mahan, Rev. Benjamin Graves, Rev. R.H. Bishop, Rev. Daniel Hayden, and Rev. Samuel Crother; three were lawyers, N. Wright, I.G. Burnet, G.W. Neff; two were general merchants, W.W. Green and Daniel Corwin; two were lumber merchants, Stephan Burrows and J.C. Tunis; one was a druggist, Robt. Boal; one a grocer, John H. Grosbeck; one a physician, Dr. James Warren; one the captain of a river boat, Capt. Robert Wallace, and three were manufacturers, James Melindy, William Holyoke, and William Schillinger. It has been impossible to determine the occupations of the other three, D. Wurtz, D.W. Fairbanks, and John Baker. Robert S. Fletcher, The History of Oberlin College from its Foundation Through the Civil War, (Oberlin, 1943) I, p. 155-157, note 14

assembled on other ordinary occasions, without the approbation of the faculty should be prohibited on pain of dismissal from the seminary; and the power of dismissal should be vested in a committee of the board of trustees."³⁵ In order that old students as well as those who planned to enter the seminary might be informed of these rules, the committee had them printed in the Cincinnati Daily Gazette. However, these rules would not be in force until they were ratified by the Board of Trustees which was scheduled to meet the following October.

Beecher, who was in the East on vacation and a fund-raising tour, was informed of the situation in the hope that he would be able to prevent the passage of this regulation, which was sure to ruin the seminary since the students were too devoted to the cause of abolition and too mature to endure the restriction placed on them by this regulation. But Beecher, instead of hastening home, stayed away. On October 6, the Board of Trustees, who were determined that the new regulation "should pass Tho' it should force every student and every member of the Faculty from the Seminary,"³⁶ met, ratified the action of the executive committee, and instructed the faculty to enforce the new rules.³⁷

In thus acting, the Board of Trustees provoked a storm of popular condemnation throughout the North. The radical press in the North labeled Lane Seminary as "pro-slavery," and William Lloyd Garrison wrote in the Liberator

³⁵Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 171, note 1

³⁶H. Stanton to J. Thome, Sept. 11, 1834, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 171

³⁷Cincinnati Daily Gazette, October 22, 1834, p. 2

that "Lane Seminary is now to be regarded as a Bastile of Oppression, A Spiritual Inquisition."³⁸

A justification of the course taken by the Board was written by Beecher and Professors Briggs and Stowe. In it they placed the blame for the whole proceedings on Weld, whose abolition obsession had made him reckless of all consequences. Beecher's attack was as follows:

In our opinion, all our difficulties were originated and continued by the instrumentality of an influential member of the Abolition Society. But while we feel called upon to say this, justice and affection require us to render at the same time a willing and melancholy homage to the talents and piety and moral courage and energy of the individual, while we lament that want of early guidance and subordination which might have qualified his mind to act safely by consultation in alliance with other minds, instead of relying with a perilous confidence in its own sufficiency...While our high expectations and warm affections have been disappointed in him...it is not without the hope and daily prayer that the past may suffice, and that wiser counsels and more auspicious movements may characterize his future course.³⁹

Faced with the choice between their work for the Negro and compliance with the seminary regulations demanded by the trustees, the students of Lane, almost to a man, asked for an honorable dismissal. This request was granted by the trustees, but with no intention on their part of helping the withdrawing "rebels" to carry out their plans for the amelioration of the plight of the Negro in Cincinnati. Fifty-three of the students signed the statement drawn up by Weld stating the reasons which compelled them to withdraw from the seminary. According to this statement, the main reason for withdrawal was the prohibition by law of their inalienable right of freedom of discussion. This, and this

³⁸Keagly, "The Lane Seminary Rebellion," p. 152

³⁹Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 187, note 6

alone, brought about their separation from Lane Seminary. In the concluding paragraph of this statement their reasons were summarized by Weld.

In conclusion we withdraw from Lane Seminary, not because the trustees and faculty claim the right to exercise a supervision over the students. This right we cordially recognize. Not because they are colonizationists and oppose the Anti-Slavery Society, nor because we are Abolitionists. Not because labor was a drugery, for we loved it...But we leave because the authorities above us have asserted the right to suspend free discussion upon their arbitrary will. Because they sanction the principle of prostration to public sentiment, corrupt and desperate as it is, by avowing the doctrine that discussion must be directed according to the popular will. Because they unwarrantably infringe upon our social rights and privileges by interdicting such conversational statements and communications, with the publication of such information 'on ordinary occasions at the table and elsewhere,' as are indispensable to the social convenience and comfort, and contribute in the mutual affection and improvement of a band of brethren engaged in the same pursuits, and constituting one family. Because they allow us no alternative but abandoning the cause of universal liberty and love, or withdrawing from Lane Seminary.⁴⁰

Thus at Lane, as was often the case, opposition to the cause of anti-slavery tended only to strengthen the students in their resolves. These efforts at repression merely fired them with added determination and a new enthusiasm for the anti-slavery cause. And more than this. The troubles at Lane publicized the abolition cause throughout the West. "Indeed, the repercussions echoed all over the North."⁴¹ For the anti-slavery movement took on a new aspect. It became associated with a campaign for freedom of speech and discussion.

Of the fifty-three students who signed the public statement in 1834, some went home and others continued their education in other schools. But the

⁴⁰Theodore Weld, "A Statement of the Reasons which Induced the Students of Lane Seminary to Dissolve their Connection with that Institution," (Cincinnati, 1834), p. 26-27

⁴¹Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 86

majority of them remained with Weld in Cincinnati to carry on the work that they had already begun. Those who remained in Cincinnati were offered the use of a large house in Cumminsville, a suburb of Cincinnati, by James Ludlow who was moved to this action by his brother-in-law, Salmon P. Chase.⁴² There, under the leadership of Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, the students organized an impromptu seminary where they could continue their education. During the winter of 1834 they alternately taught each other and visited their classes for the Negroes in the city.

In the spring of 1835, the exiles from Lane were approached by Rev. John J. Shipphard, the founder and factotum of the new Oberlin College. At the time Oberlin was suffering acutely from lack of funds and students. On his way East to appeal to the Eastern philanthropists for aid, Shipphard heard that a whole schoolful of young men - young men with wealthy Eastern benefactors - were at large in Cincinnati. He immediately set out for Cincinnati to win this group for Oberlin. So glowing were the terms with which he described Oberlin to the "Lane Rebels" that the whole group agreed to enroll at the new college, provided certain demands were granted.

The first of these demands was that they should designate Oberlin's president, faculty and rules. Asa Mahan, a Presbyterian minister and the only member of Lane's Board of Trustees who had championed the students' cause, must be elected to the presidency; and Theodore Weld and John Morgan, another of their professors at Lane, must be given professorships. A second demand was

⁴²Greve, Centennial History of Cincinnati, I, p. 594

that Negroes be admitted to the college.⁴³ Shipperd agreed to these demands, but he met with some opposition from the trustees of Oberlin who had most of the prejudices of their day with regards to abolition and the education of free Negroes. However, the situation was saved by Rev. John Keep, president of the Board and one of Weld's early abolition converts. His influence over the Board secured the necessary ratification of Shipperd's promise to the Lane students.

The students gather at Oberlin for the spring term of 1835. Asa Mahan and John Morgan accompanied them, but Weld had refused the proffered professorship on the ground that he was "totally unfit for the station,"⁴⁴ and that his work as an agent for the Anti-Slavery Society took up all his time. With them the students brought the financial backing of Arthur Tappan and his friends in New York to the amount of \$100,000.⁴⁵

Weld's refusal of the Oberlin professorship did not mean that he had abandoned his converts from Lane. Shortly after their arrival at Oberlin, Weld visited the college where he lectured on abolitionism for twenty-one nights in the cold and dingy college chapel. "Weld gave Oberlin such an anti-slavery baptism that it was ever after an abolition citadel."⁴⁶ Before Weld had finished his series of lectures, six of the students, all of them from Lane, volunteered to accept agencies from the Anti-Slavery Society. They were

⁴³Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 75

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 232, note 6

⁴⁵H. Lyman to Weld, January 22, 1835, Weld-Grimke Letters, I, p. 201

⁴⁶Thomas, Theodore Weld, p. 98

Samuel Gould, who was to earn fame as an abolition money-raiser and was the most competent administrator the Society had with the possible exception of Arthur Tappan; William T. Allan; James A. Thome; John W. Alvrod; Huntington Lyman; and Sereno W. Streeter. All of these men were to begin the work of the Society in Ohio. From the ranks of the "Lane Rebels" the national society was to draw more and more of its field agents until thirty of the fifty-three who had signed the public statement in Cincinnati were spreading the gospel of immediate abolition throughout the North. Until the formation of the famous band of "Seventy" by Weld in 1837, the Lane students formed the bulk of the anti-slavery staff in the field.

The importance of the work of Theodore Weld in Cincinnati cannot be over-estimated. His influence on the students of Lane Seminary was immeasurable, and in turn the influence that these young men exercised in the spread of the doctrines and aims of the American Anti-Slavery Society was unmatched by any other one group. Rather than agents, these men were evangelists of abolition, and their patience in the face of opposition, coupled with an eloquence born of enthusiasm for a cause which had become a religion for them, moved entire communities to align themselves under the abolition banner. Under the leadership of Weld, these young men "precipitated another Great Revival in the nation, a revival in abolitionism."⁴⁷

To mention the converts made by Weld to the cause of abolition is to mention some of the greatest figures in the anti-slavery movement. Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the Philanthropist, and National Era; James Birney,

⁴⁷Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 78

abolitionist extraordinary and presidential candidate on the Liberty Party ticket in 1840 and 1844; Elizur Wright, secretary of the national society; and many others prominent in the national and state anti-slavery societies. And we must not forget Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose association with Weld and the Lane students left an indelible impression upon her youthful mind. Years later when she was challenged to prove that the events described in Uncle Tom's Cabin could have been real, she turned to Weld's book, American Slavery, As It Is, and from its pages quoted her evidence that the characters and events portrayed in her famous book not only could be true, but actually were. It is said that Mrs. Stowe often remarked how she "kept that book in her work basket by day, and slept with it under her pillow at night, till its facts crystallized into Uncle Tom."⁴⁸

The full extent of Theodore Weld's influence and that of his followers at Lane is still to be determined. Certain it is that their meeting and subsequent actions in Cincinnati in 1834 and 1835 struck some of the sparks that kindled the fire that was to sweep the nation and purify it of the evil of human slavery.

⁴⁸Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 231, note 21

CHAPTER IV

JAMES G. BIRNEY: THE PHILANTHROPIST

A perfect complement to the labors of Theodore Weld for the abolition cause in the Cincinnati area is to be found in the work of James G. Birney. If the work and influence of a man are to serve as criteria in determining the importance of an individual in any movement, then we can say, without fear of contradiction, that James G. Birney and his newspaper, the Philanthropist, played a role equal in importance to that played by Theodore Weld and his band of missionaries in the abolition movement in Cincinnati.

James Gillespie Birney's public career extended through the whole span of the anti-slavery movement. No other man has been so prominently identified with every phase of it. Born to wealth and social prestige as the son of a wealthy trader and rope manufacturer of Louisville, connected by birth and marriage to the leading families of Kentucky's aristocracy, educated at Princeton, he served in the Kentucky state legislature, as a member of the first constitutional convention of the state of Alabama, and a sponsor of the University of Alabama, and had established himself as a slaveholding planter and successful attorney in Huntsville, Alabama. His residence in Huntsville from 1818 to 1833 served him well as a novitiate for his future work since slavery in that new and rapidly growing state was anything but a patriarchal institution.

James Birney's interest in slavery dates to 1826 when he gave "the first indication in his career of sympathy with the slave, and a consciousness of his personal duty in regard to the evil of slavery,"¹ by backing the work of the American Colonization Society. At first, Birney's interest was confined to a study of the problems involved in emancipation and spasmodic political agitation in the Alabama legislature, chief of which was his proposal of a bill "to prohibit the import of slaves into this state for sale or hire."² It was not until 1832 that Birney gave himself entirely to the cause of emancipation.

In the spring of 1832, James Birney first met Theodore Weld, who was then lecturing in the South, at the home of Dr. Allan, a Presbyterian minister and a life-long friend. As a result of a series of conversation with Weld, Birney was forced to admit that the "legal right of the slave-holder was a 'monstrous moral wrong',"³ and he was confirmed in a resolution he had long considered, namely, to move his family to a free state and devote himself entirely to the cause of the Negro. However, we must be careful not to give the impression that Weld converted Birney to anti-slavery principles. Nothing could be further from the truth. The testimony of Weld and of Birney's son William bear this out. The effect of these conversations was a deeper insight into and interest in the problem of slavery, and a conviction in regard to its removal, but his "anti-slavery principles were the organic growth of a lifetime, not a sudden

¹Birney, James G. Birney, p. 56

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 108

revelation."⁴

The most important practical effect of this new and deeper interest was Birney's acceptance of a general agency for the American Colonization Society for the Southwest in the summer of 1832. We need not dwell on his work as an agent for this organization. Its results were negligible. He organized a few scattered societies, published a series of fifteen lectures on the subject of colonization, and delivered a number of addresses to mere handfuls of listeners. Finding an almost total lack of interest in the subject on the part of both Negroes and Whites, he resigned his agency and settled with his family near Danville, Kentucky.

About the time of Birney's removal to Danville, the students of Lane Seminary were engaged in their famous debate. The echoes of this debate could not but reach the ear of Birney across the river, and he journeyed to Cincinnati to talk with Weld and the converted students who, according to Huntington Lyman, "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."⁵ Birney was a "gradual emancipationist" when he entered the service of the Colonization Society. He was near to being an immediate abolitionist when he resigned his agency; he was definitely an immediate abolitionist when he left Cincinnati. He had listened to Weld's explanation of the inner meaning of immediate abolition and had yielded to his arguments as he had two years before.

During the summer month of 1834, Weld and Birney were in constant communication. Birney had by now decided to abandon everything and devote his life

⁴Birney, James G. Birney, p. 108

⁵Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 69

exclusively to anti-slavery work. He agreed to remain in Kentucky where he organized a state anti-slavery society and established an anti-slavery newspaper the Philanthropist. Publication of the Philanthropist was begun on March 18, 1835. From the first, it was met with a storm of protest from the Kentucky slave-holders, who first requested that Birney cease printing the paper on the grounds that it was incendiary. When Birney replied in the negative, a meeting was held in the Danville Baptist Church on July 25, and five hundred participants left no doubt about their intentions to put a stop to the publication of the newspaper by resorting to mob violence if this should prove necessary. They passed a series of resolutions denouncing the Philanthropist as "wild, visionary, impracticable, unpolitical, and contrary to the spirit of our laws, and at war with the spirit of our Constitution."⁶ This action forced Birney to discontinue his newspaper, and within a month he had moved his family to Cincinnati.

James Birney established the Philanthropist at Cincinnati in January, 1836, but the actual printing of the paper was done at New Richmond until April, 1836. Cincinnati's reception of the newspaper echoed the reception it had received from the citizens of Danville six months earlier. When the news reached Cincinnati that an anti-slavery paper was to be printed there, the press of the city was loud in its denunciation of the plan.

We perceive by a notice in the Christian Journal that James G. Birney is about to commence his Abolition paper at New Richmond, Clermont County. Finding that his fanatical project would not be tolerated at Danville, Ky., nor in this city, he has at length settled himself on the border of Kentucky and so near Cincinnati as to make the pestiferous breath of his paper spread contagion among our citizens. We deem this new effort an

⁶Dumond, Anti-Slavery Origins of the Civil War, p. 33

insult to our slaveholding neighbors, and an attempt to browbeat public opinion in this quarter. We do therefore hope, notwithstanding the alleged respectability of the editor, that he will find the public so inexorably⁷ averse to his mad scheme, that he will deem it his interest to abandon it.

In unremitting warfare on the Philanthropist, the Cincinnati dailies worked together to arouse popular opinion against this abolitionist organ. One of them even hinted that if Mr. Birney did not cease publication, the citizens of the city would see to it that he did. "Should he," wrote the editor of the Whig, "and they his coadjutors, be so mad as still to persist in their present course, they assume an awful responsibility, and the consequences must be upon their own ill-fated heads."⁸ Nor is it to be thought that the voice of the Whig party in Cincinnati was alone in its denunciation of Birney and his newspaper. Forgetting political differences, the Cincinnati Republican, the Democratic paper of Cincinnati, joined the Whig in its scathing attack on this new journalistic endeavor. In an article appearing in the January 16, 1836 issue of the paper, the editor vehemently denounced the Philanthropist as unpatriotic. "This new laborer in the unholy and unpatriotic cause of abolition goes even beyond Garrison or Thompson in his uncompromising hostility to slavery and in his zeal for unqualified and immediate emancipation, and, we doubt not the editor, if encouraged to promulgate his abolition firebrands among our citizens in the spirit in which he has commenced, will win for himself as notorious and infamous a character as that which now distinguishes the two individuals above mentioned....But the editor of the 'Philanthropist' has not the plea of ignorance

⁷Cincinnati Whig, December 21, 1835, p. 2

⁸Cincinnati Whig, December 25, 1835, p. 3

for he is a man of education and talents."⁹

Such threats and abuse however, did not deter Birney from the publication of his newspaper. The first issue appeared on January 1, 1836.

In the editorial column of the first issue, Birney laid before the public the character and policy of the Philanthropist, inviting all, whatever their opinions might be, to use the columns of the paper as a vehicle of debate. "It is our intention to make the Philanthropist a repository of facts and arguments on the subject of Slavery as connected with Emancipation. This discussion we invite, and the aid we desire, we are willing to accept from any quarter that will furnish it. To the South, we have offered in our main editorial article today, the free use of our columns, to defend a system which they seem determined to continue. We repeat this offer, - and we will hope that it may be accepted in the spirit of kindness which prompts us to make it."¹⁰ That his offer was not accepted in "a spirit of kindness" is borne out by the subsequent actions on the part of the citizens of Cincinnati.

In the first edition of his paper, Mr. Birney clearly defined the purpose and program of the abolitionists which was to be the purpose and program that would be followed by the Philanthropist. He wrote that the abolitionists strove for "the abolition of slavery in the United States...and this, only through the power of truth applied to the understandings and consciences of the slaveholder to persuade them to do their duty."¹¹ The abolitionists did not believe in

⁹Cincinnati Republican, January 16, 1836, p. 3

¹⁰Philanthropist, January 1, 1836, p. 2

¹¹Ibid.

emancipation through violence or political pressure. To the adherents of the abolition doctrine of immediate emancipation, freedom for the Negro was a matter of conscience, not political expediency. "As citizens, they are not identified with any of the political parties into which the country is divided ...In elections they vote by no party mandate, but as they individually believe the most expedient."¹² Since Birney was convinced that emancipation could be accomplished only when and if the planters of the South were convinced intellectually that slavery was a moral wrong, in direct violation of the principles on which our country was founded, he prepared a series of editorials in which he argued to the unconstitutionality of the institution. These articles discuss (1) the power of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; (2) the argument that the Constitutional Convention guaranteed slavery by leaving its determination to the states; and (3) the harmony of anti-slavery principles with international law and the Federal Constitution.¹³ His enquiry was directed also to the constitutionality of the Ohio "Black Laws," and especially to the federal fugitive slave law of 1793.¹⁴ For a more complete understanding of Mr. Birney's constitutional theories on the question of slavery, let us look briefly at his arguments on each of these points.

Against those who argued that Congress had no right to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, he quoted Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 of the

¹²Philanthropist, January 1, 1836, p. 2

¹³Philanthropist, February 12, 19; April 29; October 28; November 25; and December 9, 1836

¹⁴Philanthropist, February 24, 1837, p. 2-3

Constitution which clearly states that Congress has the power "to exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such District, not exceeding ten miles squared, as might by cession of particular states and the acceptance of Congress become the seat of government of the United States." Despite the comprehensiveness of the phrase "in all cases whatsoever," there were those who argued that this clause conferred no power on Congress to deprive slave-holders of their property. To this argument, Birney answered: "If this position be tenable, Congress has no power to take any property from its owner, whether with, or without compensation; for notwithstanding the common notion (which we will attempt to rectify on some future occasion) that there is a peculiar guarantee of slave-property by the Constitution, this has not her guarantee of protection than any other species of property."¹⁵ If the power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia was not constitutionally the power of Congress, then no power on earth could legally remove slavery from the District even though a majority of its citizens should desire its legal abolition.

Suppose, that slavery (according to the uniform tendency) should become so great an evil in the District, that a very great majority of the free inhabitants should desire its legal abolition, as the only mode of relieving themselves from coming ruin. The greatness of the evil would confer no power on Congress - nothing can do this but the Constitution. Neither could the people of the District perform any act by which emancipation would be made legal - however great the majority of people in favor of it or weighty the evil pressing on them - because exclusive legislation is in the Congress. So that there would exist the remarkable anomaly of an evil existing in the community - not irremovable in its nature - its removal desired by those who are suffering under it, and yet no power in the body-politic to afford relief. To this absurdity those who oppose the construction, which gives the power to Congress, are driven in maintaining their position.¹⁶

¹⁵Philanthropist, February 12, 1836, p. 3

¹⁶Philanthropist, February 12, 1836, p. 2

After his discussion of Congress's power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, Birney next turned his attention to a refutation of the argument that the Constitutional Convention had guaranteed slavery by leaving its determination to the individual states. It was argued that, after a full and thorough discussion of the matter, the representatives of the eastern and middle states, in a spirit of compromise necessary for the formation of the Union, had resolved that slavery "in all its connexions of continuance or extermination, within the states, was to be left by the general government to the states, in their individual and independent character."¹⁷ Those who were in favor of slavery argued that in view of the fact that the members of the Constitutional Convention left the settlement of the slavery issue to the discretion of the slave states an "implied guarantee was thus promulgated that slave property should be held sacred by the Constitution, and be protected by its laws."¹⁸

James Birney began his discussion of this argument and its "implied guarantee" by calling into question the major premise of the argument, namely, that there had been a compromise after a full and thorough discussion of the matter. He denied outright that any such discussion ever took place.

Was there any submission to the convention of '87 of the subject of slavery within the states?...it must be of record if there be any - that the subject of slavery within the state, with a view to its abolition in any way or to its continuance, was made matter of discussion by a national congress or convention which we have ever had. Without asserting that there is no evidence of it - in the absence of such evidence, I deny that it ever was - either in the General Convention which declared our independence in '76; or in that, which framed the Articles of Confederation in '78; or in the Convention of '87 by which the existing Constitution was made. If you fail

¹⁷Philanthropist, February 12, 1836, p. 2

¹⁸Cincinnati Preamble and Resolutions, cf. Appendix I for this document.

in your proof where is the ground to support your insinuation, that the eastern and middle states, for the sake of union, made a sacrifice of feeling to the South? If there were no such case before the convention, no such sacrifice could have been demanded or would have been rendered.¹⁹

He conceded that there may have been a discussion of the "abominations of slavery" collaterally with the discussion on the clause of the Constitution which prohibited Congress from arresting the African slave trade prior to 1808.²⁰ But even if there was, such discussion would have no relation to the question of the legal status of slavery as it then existed within the states, since these two subjects are entirely distinct. Nor would the South, he argued, ask of the Congress a constitutional guarantee of a title which she was confident she possessed apart from anything Congress might see fit to guarantee or not to guarantee. Such a guarantee would have been an insult to the slave-holders of the South.

If it is true that the subject of slavery in relation to its continuance or abolition, was not even introduced into the convention of '87 - or into either of the two preceeding congresses - it would almost be bordering on an insult...to ask if there could be 'promulgated' any 'guarantee' implied or expressed 'that slave property should be held sacred by the Constitution and protected by its laws'...It is a very strong proof against the opinion entertained by you and nearly all pro-slavery advocates, of there being a constitutional guarantee of Slavery to the South, that the South would not ask it. Why should she? Has she ever given signs that she has less confidence in her tenure of property in man, than that in her cattle and her horses? None...How superflous for the allies of the slave-holder to plead for him the extraneous and foreign guarantee of a title, which, at no time has he in the slightest degree mistrusted.²¹

With his refutation of the contention that there had been a "full and

¹⁹Philanthropist, February 19, 1836, p. 3

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

thorough" discussion of the problem of slavery by the members of the Constitutional Convention, Birney felt that he had refuted the claim of those who held that the framers of the Constitution had left the question of the continuation or extinction of slavery to the decision of the individual states. Since there was no discussion, there was no compromise with its implied guarantee of slavery. Moreover, he refused to admit that those who drew up the Constitution could have so easily forgotten the principles for which they had fought a bloody war as to provide for perpetual slavery in any form. There was no testimony to bolster such an argument. "Many of them," he wrote, "had signed the Declaration of Independence but a few years before; they had all passed through the Revolution, and knew what we were contending for. Now to suppose - before the dust and sweat of the Revolution was well wiped away from those men, that they would falsify the principles for which they risked their lives, in consenting to fasten slavery forever on the weakest of their fellow creatures - on man - woman - child- and infant yet unborn, - is what I will not do, except on testimony that cannot be overthrown - testimony that I have never yet seen or heard."²²

He further argued that the inclusion of a provision for the rendition of fugitive slaves in the Constitution must not be misconstrued as an implied guarantee of the system since this provision was made merely to promote tranquility during the period of transition following the Revolutionary War and the ratification of the Constitution. It was a provision made with the confident expectation that slavery would soon after be abolished by all the states.

²²Dwight L. Dumond, Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857, (New York, 1938), I, p. xix

Moreover, he contended that since the slave states had failed to fulfill their obligation on this point, the free states and Congress were under no further obligation to refrain from legislation calculated to protect the person and interest of all who lived within the confines of the United States and from whom they demanded obedience to its laws.²³

Having disposed of the argument of the "implied guarantee" Birney next proceeded to demonstrate the harmony which existed between the measures of the abolitionists and international law and the Federal Constitution. In an editorial appearing in the Philanthropist for April 29, 1836, he answered the objections of those who held that the same relationship existed between the states as they then existed as was found between the sovereign kingdoms of Europe. Since this was the case, these people argued that the abolitionists of the free states were acting in direct violation of international law since they were interfering with a domestic institution of the slave states. Birney admitted that the advocates of emancipation had no right to interfere with a domestic institution of one of the other states through legislation, but the absence of the right to legislate did not mean that an absence of moral power must necessarily follow. Because a man has no right to command does not mean he has no right to persuade. And this is precisely what the abolitionists were doing. Their interference was "argumentative, not mandatory, suasive, not coercive, moral not legislative."²⁴ This distinction between moral and legislative power and the fact that the abolitionists employed moral power alone

²³Dumond, Birney Letters, I, p. xx

²⁴Philanthropist, April 29, 1836, p. 3

was enough, in his estimation, to exonerate them from the charge that their actions were at variance with the law of nations. But, it was also argued that even this moral interference was improper since it tended to excite insurrection amongst the slaves, thus endangering the lives and property of the slave-holders. Nothing, said he, was further from the truth. The abolitionists have never worked, in secret or in the open, to arouse slaves against their masters. Secrecy has had nothing to do with their operations. And if, indeed, their work was of an incendiary nature, then the same charge could be laid at the door of those who had worked for our national independence since both movements have their foundation in the same theory, namely, the natural equality of all men, regardless of color. If the doctrine of the abolitionists that taught that it was a wrong and an outrage to take away from human beings the right to preserve life, to acquire property and promote their happiness as masters of their own destinies was incendiary, "then did our venerable forefathers put up a most incendiary plea for resistance to transatlantic tyranny."²⁵

Not only was the work of the abolitionists not at variance with international law, it was also in complete harmony with the Federal Constitution and the principles upon which our nation was founded. He believed that slavery was directly contrary to the fundamental principles upon which the laws of the United States rested; and that Congress not only had the power to abolish slavery, but should use it. He went back to the Declaration of Independence for the basis for his argument, for he held that this document was as binding on the people of the United States as was the Constitution, though in a different

²⁵Philanthropist, April 29, 1836, p. 3

way.

The Constitution shows the relations of the individual to the government and those of the government to the individual. The Declaration not only regulates the nature of the government, as far as the individual is concerned, but also its nature so far as other nations are concerned. If after achieving our independence under the Declaration, we had voluntarily established a government entirely at variance with the sentiments we had published to the world, we should greatly have disappointed the good men who were interested in us everywhere...Our national character would have been looked upon as partaking of deceit. We are bound, then, as a nation - as much as a nation can be bound to others - by our honor - never to ordain anything that shall be grossly contrary to the truths which were in our mouths, when we took our seat among the congregation of nations.²⁶

Every individual, according to the Declaration, is endowed with certain natural and inalienable rights. No government has the right to take them away. Any government that does take away these rights is committing an act of usurpation and perverting the object for which governments are formed, namely, to secure the rights of the individual. Consequently, no one in his right senses can hold the slave bound to obey a law that strips him of his rights. "Can any individual innocently enslave me? If not me, he cannot any one else. If an individual cannot innocently do it, can five thousand individuals? If they cannot, can a nation though it may count five millions or fifty millions? Entertaining these thoughts, I do not believe there is a government or people on earth, be it few or many, that can rightfully establish slavery or guarantee it if established."²⁷ Over and above this, if the people of the United States through their Congress have no power to enslave, it logically follows that such a power cannot be conferred on a new state that is a creation of the Congress.

In addition to the harmony existing between the theories of the

²⁶Dumond, Birney Letters, p. xix

²⁷Ibid., p. xx

abolitionists and the principles underlying our Constitution, the work of the abolitionists was in complete accord with the obligations imposed on Congress by the Constitution to provide for national security. Birney, and many others with him, felt that the concentration of a large slave population in the South posed a threat to national security since servile insurrection would surely follow upon a foreign invasion. In such an event, Birney contended, one of two things must happen. Either the government must suppress the slave, which would amount to a war against the principles for which the United States stands and for which our forefathers fought and risked their lives, or Congress should emancipate them and by emancipation make them willing defenders of the soil. Some would hold that such emancipation would be justified by the "war powers" which the Constitution vests in the Congress. But Birney, who felt that even in the time of war the Congress could not exceed its constitutional limitations, argued that this power of emancipation was inherent in Congress and the the emergency caused by a war would merely serve as the occasion for Congress to do something that it ought to have done long before.²⁸

The advancement of such theories far from winning the solid citizens of Cincinnati to the cause of abolition, served to arouse them to militant action, for they saw in these theories, which the planters of the South were sure to read, a threat to their own commercial security and prosperity. In April, 1836, Birney had moved his press from New Richmond to Cincinnati, feeling that such an action would force the hand of the "pro-slavery aristocracy made up of 'capitalists, merchants, tradesmen, whose interests are linked with those of

²⁸Dumond, Birney Letters, I, p. xx

of the South!"²⁹ by publically demonstrating to the people of Ohio was the stronger, "they, declaring their will through the constitution of the state; or the slave-holder of the South, declaring theirs through their willing coadjutors in our midst."³⁰ His move in effect was an eloquent plea for freedom of the press, for the leaders of Cincinnati must respect his right to print his views, though contrary to their own, or else they would be forced to resort to actions that were contrary to the principles upon which the republican structure of the nation rested. In either case, Birney felt that he would emerge the victor.

No opposition met the removal of the press from New Richmond to Cincinnati, nor were there any signs of hostility the following May when it was announced that the Philanthropist was henceforth to be the official organ of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. This total lack of violent opposition plus the fact that by July the number of subscribers to the paper had more than doubled, lulled Birney into a false sense of security and a feeling of optimism. He felt certain that at long last he had won complete tolerance for the anti-slavery movement from the citizens of Cincinnati.

But suddenly and without the slightest warning the storm of violence against the paper broke. At midnight on July 12, the printshop of Achilles Pugh who printed the paper for Birney, was entered by a mob. The issue of the Philanthropist for that week was destroyed and the press and type were seriously damaged. Threats were made at the same time that if the publication of the paper did not immediately cease, the mob would return again and do a more

²⁹Philanthropist, March 4, 1836, p. 3

³⁰Ibid.

thorough job.³¹

A few days later a handbill was stuck up on the corners of the principal streets informing the abolitionists of the feelings of the citizenry toward their newspaper.

Abolitionists, Beware! The citizens of Cincinnati, embracing every class interested in the prosperity of the City, satisfied that the business of the place is receiving a vital stab from the wicked and misguided operation of the abolitionists, are resolved to arrest their course. The destruction of their press on the night of the 12th instant, may be taken as a warning. As there are some worthy citizens engaged in the unholy cause of annoying our Southern neighbors, they are appealed to, to pause before they bring things to a crisis. If an attempt is made to re-establish their press, it will be viewed as an act of defiance to an already outraged community, and on their heads be the result that will follow. Every kind of expostulation and remonstrance has been resorted to in vain - longer patience would be criminal. The plan is matured to eradicate an evil which every citizen feels is undermining his business and property.³²

Birney received a personal warning in the form of an anonymous letter from Covington, Kentucky, which warned him of a plan to tar and feather him³³ and a notice was circulated offering a \$100 reward "for the delivery of the body of one James G. Birney, a fugitive from justice."³⁴

The Cincinnati Gazette for July 21, carried a notice of a meeting to be held that following Saturday evening at the Lower Market House "to decide whether they (the citizens of Cincinnati) will permit the publication or distribution of Abolition papers in this City...it being alleged that there is a settled determination existing in an overwhelming majority of the citizens to

³¹A complete account of the actions of the mob appeared in the July 15, 1836 issue of the Philanthropist.

³²Dumond, Birney Letters, I, facing p. 342

³³Alpha to Birney, July (?) 1836, Birney Letters, I, p. 342

³⁴Philanthropist, July 21, 1836, p. 2

put down the alleged evil by force if admonitions are found insufficient."³⁵

The meeting was held with William Burke, a minister and the postmaster of Cincinnati, acting as chairman. While protesting their recognition of "the constitutional right of liberty of speech and the press," the participants felt it "a duty to utter a warning voice to those concerned in the promulgation of abolition doctrine...because we believe their course calculated to inflame the passions of one portion of our yet happy country against the other."³⁶ Since the abolitionist newspaper was inimical to the peace and prosperity of Cincinnati and so at variance with the feelings and opinions of the great mass of its population, the leaders of the meeting resolved that "nothing short of the absolute discontinuance of the publication of the said Abolition paper, in this city, can prevent a resort to violence."³⁷ A committee, made up of thirteen of the wealthiest and most influential men of the city,³⁸ was to call upon Mr. Birney to communicate to him the actual tone of public sentiment and to warn him that failure on his part to desist from publication would make him alone responsible for the consequences. Since the Philanthropist was the official paper of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, Birney did not feel that the reply to the demands of this committee should be his alone. In view of this, he arranged a meeting between the committee and the executive board of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society for July 28. Judge Burnet, chairman of the citizens' com-

³⁵Cincinnati Gazette, July 21, 1836, p. 2

³⁶Ibid., July 25, 1836, p.2

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸A list of the committee members will be found in appendix II

mittee, informed the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society that nineteen-twentieths of the people of Cincinnati opposed the publication of the Philanthropist, and that a refusal on the part of the abolitionists to cease publication of the journal would result in a destruction of the press by a mob which, in Judge Burnet's estimation, would be made up of at least five thousand people and include at least two-thirds of the property holders of the city. The abolitionists were given until noon the following day to reach their decision.

A negative answer was submitted to Judge Burnet the following day, together with a statement of the reasons for this refusal to halt the printing of the paper. The abolitionist leaders felt that compliance on their part to the demands made of them by the citizens' committee would involve a "tame surrender of Freedom of the Press and a base and unmanly submission to insolent and high-handed dictation from the South."³⁹ This answer was published in the Whig and the Republican, but Hammond of the Gazette postponed its publication in his paper until the following Monday, in the interest of peace and order.⁴⁰ What followed was the mob action of Saturday night, July 30.

Shortly after dark a mob gathered at Seventh and Main Streets and from there it proceeded to the office of the Philanthropist then located at Sixth and Main. The office was quickly broken into and pillaged, the type scattered and the press thrown into the river. Though the resolutions of the meeting, held earlier that day at the Exchange, to destroy the press by force had been made public, no policeman was to be seen during the entire proceedings. The Mayor of

³⁹Cincinnati Gazette, August 1, 1836, p. 2

⁴⁰Ibid.

Cincinnati, however, was a silent spectator of the whole affair.

When they were satisfied that the destruction of the press was complete, the mob turned to the next item on their agenda, the taring and feathering of James Birney and other prominent abolitionists of the city. Converging on the Birney home on Rush Street, the mob was met by William Birney, then a boy of fifteen, who told them that his father was not in the city, having gone to Lebanon, Ohio, to deliver a lecture. The look of determination on the face of young Birney and a shotgun in his hands prevented any acts of violence against the Birney residence. From Birney's the crowd surged on to the home of William Donaldson, one of the members of the executive committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, but once again they were frustrated, their intended victim not being at home. Turning then to Church Alley, the section of the city inhabited by the city's Negro population, the mob destroyed the homes of some of the unoffending Negroes and forced their occupants to flee into the streets. It was only then, about midnight, after four hours of destruction without police interference that there was any attempt on the part of the civil authorities to interfere. Mayor Davis addressed the crowd, calling on them to desist from further disturbance since, as he said, "we have done enough for one night...The abolitionists themselves must be convinced by this time what public sentiment is."⁴¹

Birney did not return to Cincinnati till the following Tuesday, and by then a campaign conducted by Charles Hammond of the Gazette had done much to restore

⁴¹Fladeland, James G. Birney, p. 246

peace and order to the city.⁴²

As is often the case, the mob did more to help the cause of abolition than to hinder it. Many of the books and pamphlets thrown from the office of the paper had been carried away and read by those who, under other circumstances, would have scorned anything in the nature of abolition propaganda. In fact, Birney was to write to Lewis Tappan that "the break up circulated our publications through the city better than we could have done it."⁴³ In other cases, men like Charles Hammond, while not converted to abolitionism, saw in this violent attempt to silence the abolitionist press, a threat to the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and the press, and as a consequence joined the abolitionists of Cincinnati in their fight to be heard. Perhaps the most notable convert to the abolitionist ranks as a result of this mob was Salmon P. Chase, future United States senator, governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Treasury in Lincoln's war cabinet, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Though Mr. Chase had had definite opinions regarding the unconstitutionality of slavery prior to the mob's destruction of the Philanthropist, it was this incident that caused him to stand openly with the abolitionists.

Publication of the Philanthropist was, of course, resumed. But Mr. Birney remained its editor only long enough to train Gamaliel Bailey for the editorship. Birney was to remain in Cincinnati only a few months after the mob's destruction of the Philanthropist, but before he left he was once again put

⁴²A detailed account of the events leading up to and including the actions of the mob of July 30 were recounted in a booklet written by Birney entitled, Narrative of the Late Riotous Proceedings Against the Liberty of the Press in Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1836)

⁴³Birney to Lewis Tappan, August 10, 1836, Birney Letters, I, p. 351

before the public eye, this time as a harborer of a fugitive slave. This incident, popularly known as the Matilda Case, was also important in that it was the first time that Salmon Chase was called upon to render legal aid in behalf of a fugitive slave. The defense of fugitive slaves was a work that Mr. Chase was to undertake with such a vigor as to win for himself the title of "attorney-general of the runaway slaves."

Matilda, the principal in the case, was an octoroon slave belonging to Larkin Lawrence of Missouri, and according to some reports she was his daughter. She accompanied her master on a trip to the East, and when their boat was detained in Cincinnati, Matilda took the opportunity to escape while she was in free territory. She was concealed for several days by a Negro family until word was brought that Lawrence had continued to St. Louis, seemingly without making any effort to locate the runaway. On the strength of this knowledge, Matilda reasoned that because her master did not immediately try to find her, it was not his intention to try to recapture her. Assured by this reasoning, she resolved to remain in Cincinnati and seek employment there, eventually ending up in the Birney household.

Because to all outward appearances Matilda was completely white, the Birney family did not doubt her story of being a farm girl from Missouri who had come to Cincinnati to find work because of the poverty of her family. It was not until she had been in the Birney home for several weeks that she confided her secret to Mrs. Birney, who in turn told Mr. Birney. As several weeks had passed since her escape and no efforts had been made to recapture her, Birney decided to allow her to remain in Cincinnati instead of sending her farther North.

On March 10, a city constable appeared at the Birney home with a warrant for her arrest, issued on the strength of an affidavit presented by John M. Riley, who was known in Cincinnati for his unsavory reputation as a Negro hunter, and who claimed to be an agent of Larkin Lawrence with a commission from the Missouri planter authorizing him to hunt out and retake the runaway Matilda.

Though Birney was privately of the opinion that there was little chance of legally obtaining her release, he nevertheless sought to defend Matilda with the best legal talent available. Salmon P. Chase was his obvious choice. From his defense of Matilda it is obvious that Chase adopted as his own the interpretations of Birney regarding the legal and constitutional aspects of the fugitive slave law as it was applied in Ohio.⁴⁴ He based his argument on the proposition that Matilda had voluntarily been brought by her owner to a free state, and by that act the girl had become legally free, and could in no sense be called a fugitive nor could she be reclaimed as a fugitive under the Federal law.⁴⁵ His defense in brief was as follows.

He maintained that (1) the warrant and affidavit were void because the fugitive slave law authorized no issuing of judicial processes and there was no such law among the state statutes; (2) the commitment was void because it was in the name of the State of Ohio but not authorized by any law of Ohio; (3) the fugitive slave law was repugnant to the Ordinance of 1787 and could have no jurisdiction over justices of the peace in states formed from the Northwest Territory; (4) the laws of Ohio gave no jurisdiction to justices of the peace, and if they did, they would be unconstitutional; and (5) at the time Matilda left her master she was not held in service, in one state from which she escaped to another.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Albert Bushnell Hart, Salmon Portland Chase, (Boston, 1899) p. 65-66

⁴⁵J.W. Schuckers, Salmon Portland Chase, (New York, 1874) p. 42

⁴⁶Fladeland, James G. Birney, p. 152

Despite the eloquent defense by Chase, the decision of the court was a foregone conclusion. The court held that Matilda was still legally a slave and must be turned over to Riley. She was sent to New Orleans and there sold at public auction, a fact which in itself proved that Riley was not an agent of Lawrence and had perjured himself to obtain the warrant for her arrest. The Birney family never heard of the unfortunate girl again.

No sooner had the case against Matilda been settled than Birney himself was indicted for having violated the Ohio fugitive slave law of 1804 in harboring and concealing a mulatto person who was the property of another. The prosecution was led by R.T. Lytle, one of the leaders at the anti-abolitionist meeting of the previous summer, and one of the most outspoken of Birney's foes in Cincinnati. Again the decision of the court was known before it was uttered. Birney was found guilty and fined fifty dollars. Birney and Chase saw in this case an excellent opportunity to test the constitutionality of the law of 1804 and so appealed the decision of the Court of Common Pleas to the Supreme Court of Ohio. This court instead of facing the issue, reversed the decision of the lower court against Birney on a technicality. The Supreme Court held "that color afforded no presumption of condition; there was no evidence, therefore, that Birney had knowingly harbored a fugitive slave."⁴⁷

Taken at its face value, the Matilda case may seem just another case in a long legal battle over the constitutionality of the fugitive slave laws. But if we look at it a little more carefully, we find that it was important for two reasons. First, it provided James Birney with the opportunity to present his views on the unconstitutionality of the Ohio "Black Laws" before the highest

⁴⁷Fladeland, James G. Birney, p. 154

court in the state. And while the Supreme Court did not show itself willing to meet the question squarely at this time, the decision handed down by the court gives us ground for saying that it probably thought the judgment of the lower court ought to be reversed. Thus the Matilda case did prepare the way for the day ten years later when the Supreme Court of Ohio would recognize that a slave brought by his master to free soil became free.⁴⁸

The Matilda case was important for another reason. It was the first fugitive slave case argued by Mr. Chase and was to launch him on his career as "attorney-general of the runaway slaves." By bringing Chase into close contact with Birney and his work, it provided Birney with the occasion for instilling into Chase's reasoning his legal and constitutional interpretations, interpretations that Chase was to use later as the basis for his own arguments against the constitutionality of the state and federal fugitive slave laws.

By 1837 the name of James G. Birney had become well known to people all over the country who were interested in the anti-slavery movement whether as its friends or its enemies. The fact that he, an ex-slave-holder, was a leader in the movement was unusual enough to make people take notice of him. But it was his work with the Philanthropist in Cincinnati that won him national recognition as one of the outstanding interpreters of the legal and constitutional stand of the abolitionists. The regard with which he was held by the leaders

⁴⁸The decision mentioned was handed down in the case of Samuel Watson, a fugitive slave. This case was argued by Chase with the help of William Birney. The arguments used were the same that Chase had employed in the Matilda case, and, paradoxically the presiding justice was the Hon. N.C. Read, who had been one of the attorneys for the plaintiff in the Matilda case and one of the prosecutors in the case against Birney. For Justice Read's opinion in this case confer J.W. Schuckers, Salmon P. Chase, p. 77

of the anti-slavery movement at this time is attested to by their asking him to assume the position of corresponding secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, a key position in the organization. Theodore Weld wrote to Birney at this time: "In the present state of the cause somebody must fill that office in whom the whole abolition community have perfect confidence and who will be greatly respected by the Church and heeded by the world - some one whose wisdom, forecast, prudence, thorough going principle, firmness, fearlessness, and piety afford the assurance of firm anchorage."⁴⁹

The Philanthropist was firmly established in Cincinnati, and, thanks to the work of Birney and the Lane Rebels, Ohio was well on the way to being won to the abolitionist cause. There was, therefore, no pressing need of Birney's remaining in Cincinnati, so he accepted the proffered position in New York and moved there in the fall of 1837.

This move marked the close of Birney's activities in Cincinnati, and the opening of a new phase in his life and work. After leaving Cincinnati he was to become the executive secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, vice-president of the World Anti-Slavery Convention, and in 1840 and 1844 candidate for president of the United States on the Liberty Party ticket.

The years spent by Birney in Cincinnati were certainly among the most important ones in his life. It was there, while editor of the Philanthropist, that he formulated and crystallized his views on the illegality and the unconstitutionality of slavery. It was there that he won his most famous convert to the cause of abolition, Salmon P. Chase. And it was his work in

⁴⁹Weld to Birney, May 23, 1837, quoted in Fladeland, James G. Birney, p. 155

Cincinnati that won recognition and esteem for him in national abolition circles, while at the same time making him the one man most feared and respected by the opponents of the anti-slavery movement in both the North and the South. We are safe in saying that no other man, with the possible exception of Theodore Weld, played as important a role in the eventual abolitionizing of Cincinnati and the whole of Ohio than did James Gillespie Birney.

CHAPTER V

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN CINCINNATI

Few episodes in the course of American history have furnished the student with such romance, mystery and human drama as does the operation that if known to the historian as the Underground Railroad. Nothing that was done by those who labored for the emancipation of the Negro slaves did more to intensify the friction between the North and South nor did anything emphasize in a more dramatic way the determination of these men to destroy slavery than this systematic operation whereby fugitive slaves received aid in their bid for freedom. Nothing was more irritating and troublesome to the slave-holder of the South and their friends and sympathizers in the North, nor was anything better calculated to wreak havoc on the institution of slavery than the work of the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad was neither a railroad nor was it underground, but there was a fitness in the name which brought about its general use in referring to the various ways in which fugitive slaves were assisted in escaping to the North and freedom. Generally railroad terminology was used to describe the various phases of this work. Men who were very active in the work, fearless of the consequences, were "managers"; "contributing members" were those who, while they did not openly take part in the railroad's operations, did aid in the work through contributions of money, clothes, and food. "Conductor" was the term

used to designate those who piloted slaves from one hiding place to another. These hiding places were known as "stations."

The very nature of the work done by the Railroad precluded the keeping of records, so that an accurate estimate of the number of fugitives who were helped on the way to freedom along its lines is almost impossible to give. We do have the statement of Governor Quitman of Mississippi who estimated that between 1810 and 1850 the South lost 100,000 slaves valued at more than thirty million dollars through the work of the Underground Railroad. Of this number it has been ascertained that approximately 40,000 passed through Ohio alone.¹ If this is true, then it can certainly be said that no one state played a more active role in aiding fugitive slaves than Ohio. Especially is this true of the section extending from Cincinnati northward to the shores of Lake Erie.

The reasons for the importance of Ohio in this particular phase of the abolition movement are numerous. First, the geographical situation of the state made it a natural route for slaves seeking freedom in the far northern states or Canada. A second factor was the settlement of the southwestern counties of the state by Southern abolitionists, and the presence of a large number of Quakers and other church groups with pronounced anti-slavery views. Thirdly, there is the fact that from the earliest days of the movement there was an abundance of abolition literature made available to the people of Ohio with the consequent early and rapid development of the abolition movement in the state, and the presence of a large number of anti-slavery leaders of marked ability.

The most important of these reasons was the first one advanced, namely, the

¹Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 255-56

geographical location of the state. If you take a map of the United States and study it, you will see that the shortest route from the slave states of the South to British soil in Canada, where freedom was assured the fugitive by law, was across Ohio. Only a little more than two hundred miles separated the slave from liberty after he had crossed the Ohio River. Is it any wonder then that this state was the favorite route of the runaways, and that more fugitives reached safety by the routes of the Underground Railroad crossing Ohio than by those through any other state.

Though the roots of the Underground Railroad can be traced back to the late years of the eighteenth century, it lacked true organization and systematic operation until the second decade of the nineteenth century. It was first called the Underground Railroad in Ohio about 1831. Tice Davids a fugitive, so the story goes, pursued his way to freedom with his master at his heels until he reached the Ohio River opposite Ripley in Brown County. Here the fugitive was able to gain a little time by swimming the Ohio while his master was searching for a skiff. By the time the master had found a boat and reached the Ohio side of the river his property had disappeared. After a hasty hunt in which he found not the slightest trace of the missing man, he exclaimed in bewilderment, "That nigger must have gone off on an underground road."² The aptness of this phrase was so apparent that it rapidly passed from mouth to mouth, and with the development of travel by steam, naturally became "Underground Railroad."

The operation of the railroad was simple and carried on in complete secrecy. A fugitive who reached an initial station received food and clothing

²Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 251

and was hidden in an attic, hay-mow, corncrib or in caves, until he could be safely moved to the next station. All travel was at night to lessen the chance of capture, which very seldom happened. The process was repeated at each station until the slave reached one of the lake ports in the northern part of the state where he was placed on a boat that would take him to Canada and security.

Secrecy was the most notable characteristic of the operation of the railroad, which is easily understandable when one remembers that fugitive slave laws existed from 1793 and imposed penalties of fines and imprisonment for concealing runaway slaves or aiding them in any way to avoid capture. Often the closest friends of the agents and conductors knew absolutely nothing about the secreting and forwarding of fugitives by their friends. This secrecy was important since "the majority of people of Ohio, probably, during all the time that the underground railroad was in operation, were not in sympathy with its work."³ This fact is verified by the numerous instances of ostracism and mobbing of underground workers by their neighbors.⁴

The operators of the underground were, taken as a whole, a shrewd and capable lot of men and women. If they had not been, many more fugitives out of the thousands they aided would have been returned to slavery than the few who actually were recaptured. A good example of this shrewdness and foresight is demonstrated by the practice of Levi Coffin in testing out a route occasionally

³Samuel S. Knabenshue, "The Underground Railroad," Ohio Archeological and Historical Society Quarterly XIV, (Columbus, 1905) p. 398

⁴Henrietta Buckmaster, Let My People Go, (New York, 1941) p. 67; Philanthropist, February 3, 1831, p. 3

by sending a conductor along it with a number of free Negroes disguised as fugitives.⁵

Although as a rule most of the actual work involved in transporting the slaves was performed by men, women occasionally acted as guides. For example, Laura Haviland, a schoolteacher, tells of conducting fugitives all the way from Levi Coffin's in Cincinnati to Canada.⁶ And while it is also true that the agents and operators of the line were drawn in most part from various slavery-hating religious communities, it is also true that "young and old, rich and poor farmers, merchants, doctors, judges, college presidents, senators, future governors and presidents of the United States, Democrats as well as abolitionist ...all had a hand in forwarding fugitives on their way to Canada."⁷

The actual credit for the organization and development of the underground railroad in southwestern Ohio must in large part go to Rev. John Rankin of Ripley, Brown County. Some years after the close of the Civil War, when Henry Ward Beecher was asked: "Who abolished slavery," he was said to have answered without a moment's hesitation: "John Rankin and his sons did it."⁸

John Rankin was pastor of the Presbyterian church in Ripley, having settled there with his family in 1821. He was employed for a time by the American Anti-Slavery Society as a lecturer, but most of his time from 1828 to the outbreak of

⁵Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin (Cincinnati, 1876) p. 317

⁶Laura S. Haviland, A Woman's Life Work, (Chicago, 1880) p. 111

⁷Edward O'Connor Purtee, "The Underground Railroad from Southwestern Ohio to Lake Erie," unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, (Ohio State University, Columbus, 1932), p. 32

⁸Fladeland, James G. Birney, p. 109

the Civil War was spent in Ripley where his house high on Liberty Hill overlooking the Ohio River served as a beacon of liberty for slaves escaping through Kentucky. Lights placed in its gable-end windows at night are said to have guided more than 2,000 slaves to its shelter.⁹ His work for the fugitives was to be rewarded by over a hundred beatings at the hands of southern sympathizers and slave hunters.¹⁰ Among the thousands of fugitives given assistance by him were Eliza and George Harris of Uncle Tom's Cabin fame, and Tice Davids whose master's ejaculation gave the road its name.

From the very earliest days of the Underground Railroad, Cincinnati played an important role as a southern terminus of the line. So important was Cincinnati that it was to win the designation of the "Underground Railroad Union Depot."¹¹ Once again the reasons for the importance of Cincinnati in the operation of the underground railroad are easily understandable. It was removed but a few miles from the world-renown blue grass country of Kentucky, and from Covington and Newport, Kentucky, ramparts of slavery, by no greater obstacle than the Ohio River. The Ohio River being a tributary of the Mississippi, furnished a route from the heart of the slave-holding South to the steamboat landing at Cincinnati. Instances of slaves escaping from the deep South via steamboat to Cincinnati are numerous.¹² For slaves fleeing overland, logs, rafts or canoes furnished by the Underground agents were used to cross the river. In many cases the captains of the ferries between Covington and

⁹W.H. Seibert, Mysteries of Ohio's Underground Railroad (Columbus, 1951)p.70

¹⁰Philanthropist, February, 1831, p. 3

¹¹Seibert, Mysteries of Ohio's Underground Railroad, p. 26

¹²Ibid., p. 28; Purtee, "The Underground Railroad" p. 34

Cincinnati were friendly to the cause and so willing to help that eventually the state of Kentucky passed a law prohibiting "the transportation of slaves by owners of ferries, except in the company of their masters or by written authority," and for every offense against this law the legislature imposed a penalty of "forfeiture of ferry rights, a fine of \$200 and the sum equal to the value of the slave."¹³ When it was decided to build a bridge between Cincinnati and Covington, Kentucky was so afraid that the slaves would make use of this means to escape across the river that she placed in the charter of the Wire Suspension Bridge Company a clause holding the company responsible for all slaves who should cross it without permits from their masters.¹⁴

Another reason behind Cincinnati's importance as a station on the railroad was the fact that it contained a flourishing congregation of Quakers and a large free Negro population, both of which groups were untiring in the work of aiding runaways. Again, in the summer, Cincinnati was the summer resort for planters from Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, and it was not difficult for local abolitionists to coax their attending servants away from their masters. The bridging of the Ohio River by ice in the winter furnished slaves with an excellent avenue of escape, and according to Levi Coffin the abolitionists of Cincinnati could expect a stampede of fugitives from Kentucky at this time.¹⁵

By far the most important individual in the work of the underground railroad in Cincinnati was the Quaker Levi Coffin. The work done by this implacable

¹³Purtee, "The Underground Railroad," p. 34

¹⁴Ibid., p. 35

¹⁵Seibert, Mysteries of Ohio's Underground Railroad, p. 471

enemy of slavery was such as to win for him the title of "President of the Underground Railroad."¹⁶ By occupation Coffin was a general merchant, whose store at Sixth and Elm Streets sold no goods not made by free labor. The building in which his store was located also doubled as the busiest "waiting room" on the whole underground system since its basement and two upper floors frequently served as the hiding place for twenty to thirty slaves at a time. When this building was razed in 1936, in its west foundation wall and in the foundations of buildings for three blocks westward, indications were found of a walled passage five feet high and four feet wide extending to John Street, and connecting with another that ran north and south under that street.¹⁷ Later Mr. Coffin was to own homes on the southwest corner of Franklin Street and Broadway, near Woodward College, and one near the Beecher home in Walnut Hills.¹⁸ Both of these homes were to provide havens of refuge for fugitive slaves. In order to help the fugitives, Coffin had established a chain of "stations" twenty or thirty miles apart across the state of Ohio and into Michigan. To transport the slaves who came to him for help, Coffin relied on the assistance of several trustworthy colored men living in the city. These men "who owned no property and who could lose nothing in prosecution,"¹⁹ acted as drivers of the wagons and carriages Coffin rented for the purpose from a German livery stable.²⁰ The fugitives were removed from Cincinnati under the cover of darkness and

¹⁶Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 253

¹⁷Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians, p. 215

¹⁸Siebert, Mysteries of Ohio's Underground Railroad, p. 37

¹⁹Coffin, Reminiscences, p. 300

²⁰Ibid., p. 299

transported to the next "station" some twenty-five miles north where they were hidden by the abolitionists of the neighborhood until nightfall when the process was repeated. In order to provide the fugitives with clothing, of which they were generally in great need, an Anti-Slavery Sewing Society was organized among the ladies of Cincinnati who wished to lend their help in the work of the railroad. This group, under the leadership of Mrs. Coffin, met weekly at the Coffin home and "wrought much practical good by their labors."²¹

The willingness of the Coffins to aid the slaves was well known to all the abolitionists of the city and hardly a slave that came to Cincinnati did not receive aid of them in some manner or other.²² The route managed by Coffin northward from Cincinnati to Detroit "was the most largely traveled route and mostly used by slaves escaping from Kentucky and Tennessee."²³

If Coffin's work in secreting and transporting fugitives earned for him the title of "President of the Underground Railroad," he was equally entitled to the designation of "Treasurer" through his labors in procuring funds for the operation of the system. Besides directing much of the road's traffic, he worked untiringly to collect funds for the numerous expenses that its operation entailed, to the extent that his own private business was neglected in great measure in favor of fund raising campaigns for the railroad. It has been estimated that Coffin gave over \$50,000 of his own money to the work, and collected over twice

²¹Coffin, Reminiscences, p. 300

²²Ibid., p. 301

²³John R. Holmes, Levi Coffin, (unpublished manuscript in the collection of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio)

that amount from local friends of the underground railroad.²⁴ He canvassed numerous persons in Cincinnati for the purpose of "selling them stock in the Underground Railroad at a dollar or more a share,"²⁵ and in one instance he secured several dollars for the "worthy poor" from some Southern planters who were in Cincinnati looking for their runaway slaves.²⁶

The work of Levi Coffin in Cincinnati made him, along with John Rankin, the best known operator west of the Appalachian Mountains. His leadership among the operators of Cincinnati was undisputed. Years after the last run of the underground railroad, one of his associates in the work was to write of him: "In strategy and secrecy he was a marvel. We were all proud to take our command from him, to do what he would let us do, which was chiefly to supply shelter, food, clothing and money. He preferred to manage the transportation part of the business himself."²⁷ His reputation was such that practically all the abductors who worked in the slave territory south of Cincinnati either took their fugitives to him or sent them there.²⁸ His phenomenal zeal made it possible for him to personally aid over 3,000 slaves to reach safety and freedom in Canada.²⁹

The labors of Levi Coffin were largely supplemented by other agents and stationmasters in Cincinnati who made up the Railroad's Board of Directors. A

²⁴Siebert, Mysteries, p. 36

²⁵Coffin, Reminiscences, p. 320-321

²⁶Howe, Historical Collections, III, p. 464

²⁷Purtee, "Underground Railroad," p. 32

²⁸Ibid., p. 45

²⁹Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 254

notable station was maintained by George David in his pork packing house at 113 Sycamore Street. David's work was such that his plant became identified as much with the hiding of fugitive slaves as with the packing of meat.³⁰ Another station was the renowned Anti-Slavery Church at 25 W. Sixth Street. This church was organized in 1827 by a group of Cincinnati Methodists after a split with the other Methodists of city on the question of slavery. Many of its members became active workers on the Underground Railroad and the basement of the church served as a "waiting room" for over twenty years.³¹ A third station of importance was the Franklin and Lafayette Bank Building at 127 E. Third. An underground tunnel leading from the bank's cellar to the waterfront, originally planned as a means of transporting money, was used to pass runaway slaves to hiding places provided by the abolitionists.³² One of the leading forwarders of the city was a young medical student, Norton S. Townshend, one of the organizers of Ohio State University and for years professor of agriculture at that school. It was Townshend who would provide teams and carriages for the transportation of runaways out of the city as well as instructions as to the location of the next station along the line.³³ Other stations where the escapees could be assured of finding help were located in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Zion Baptist Church, the home of Thomas and Jane Dorum on Main and Fourteenth Streets, the "Little Stone Jug Station" at Peebles Corner, the

³⁰Seibert, Mysteries, p. 38

³¹Cincinnati, A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors, (Cincinnati, 1943) p. 192

³²Ibid., p. 158

³³Seibert, Mysteries, p. 32

Mortimer Matthews estate in Glendale, and the home of Rev. John W. Scott, Benjamin Harrison's father-in-law, on the corner of Hamilton Pike and Compton Road, Mount Healthy.³⁴ Perhaps the one station that was to accomplish the most, in an indirect manner, for the abolitionist cause was that maintained by Harriet Beecher Stowe and her husband at Lane Seminary in Walnut Hills. Mrs. Stowe began this work shortly after her marriage in 1836 and continued it until she and her husband moved to Maine in 1850.³⁵ It may safely be supposed that much of the material for her famous Uncle Tom's Cabin was garnered during these years in her conversations with the fugitives she was aiding and from her contact with the other station managers in and around Cincinnati. The thrilling episode of Eliza escaping across the Ohio River with her child in her arms as the ice was breaking up was based on an actual occurrence that Mrs. Stowe heard of through her friend and co-worker on the underground, John Rankin.³⁶

Two of the stations in the network of the underground railroad in Cincinnati's environs were actually located in slave territory in Covington. These were the Carneal house at 405 E. Second Street, the home of Thomas Carneal one of the founders of Covington,³⁷ and the other was located in the home of John W. Stevenson at 318-20 Garrard Street, where subterranean cellars hidden under the house and yard were used to conceal fugitives until an opportune time

³⁴Seibert, Mysteries, p. 30-33; Cincinnati Guide, p. 497

³⁵Seibert, Mysteries, p. 31

³⁶Ibid., p. 47

³⁷Cincinnati Guide, p. 522

presented itself for transporting them to safer hiding places across the river in Cincinnati.³⁸

Because the locations of other stations have not been explicitly mentioned does not mean that other did not exist. To name all the stations of the Cincinnati area would result in a listing of the homes of most of the Quakers and Negroes of the city and a greater part of its churches. Since such a task is beyond the scope of this work, only the principal stations have been named.

Once a slave reached one of the southern most termini of the railroad in Cincinnati, there were a number of routes along which an operator might send the fugitive farther north. The most popular of the routes seems to have been the one through Walnut Hills, where Lane Seminary was located. From Walnut Hills the principal routes went either northwest through Hamilton and various settlements in Prebel County and thence to Richmond or Newport, Indiana, or northeastward through either Wilmington or Xenia to Springfield, and thence to Bellfontaine, Kenton, Tiffin and Sandusky where lake steamers met the slaves and carried them to Canada. From Xenia a second route lay through Mechanicsburg, Marysville, Delaware, Mt. Gilead and Mansfield, passing on to Sandusky, Huron, Cleveland or some other lake port. A few slaves were passed north through Dayton, but that section of the state was strongly pro-slavery, and was shunned whenever possible.³⁹

A second route out of Cincinnati trailed up and over Mt. Auburn, through Chiviot to Dunlap. From Dunlap the fugitives were conducted to Darrrton, and

³⁸Cincinnati Guide, p. 497

³⁹Purtee, "Underground Railroad," p. 38

through Morning Sun and Fairhaven to stations in Union and Wayne Counties, Indiana.⁴⁰ A third route lay through College Hill and stations in Mt. Healthy, Batavia, Milford, and Hamilton. From Hamilton the routes to the north lay either in the direction of West Elkton, Oxford or Fairhaven, and thence into Indiana.⁴¹ Two other routes that were popular in the later years of the railroad were the Miami and Erie Canal to Toledo, and the Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati Railroad.⁴² Though other spurs did exist, the ones mentioned above seemed to have been the most popular with the agents in Cincinnati.

The fact that Cincinnati contained so many stations and that its geographical location naturally made it the goal of most of the slaves fleeing from servitude in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana was responsible for the large number of fugitive slave cases tried in the federal courts of the city. Mention has already been made of the reputation Salmon Chase earned because of his defense of fugitives. Other prominent lawyers, some of them later gaining national prominence, also acted as counsels for fugitives tried in that city. Among them were John Joliffe, William Birney, son of James Birney and later a Major-General in the Union Army, and Rutherford B. Hayes who later became nineteenth president of the United States. With justice it has been said that the Negro fugitives tried in Cincinnati "had more capable lawyers pleading for them than the average citizen of Ohio could afford."⁴³

⁴⁰Seibert, Mysteries, p. 51

⁴¹Ibid., p. 50

⁴²Ibid., p. 52

⁴³Purtee, "Underground Railroad," p. 107

Though most of these cases resulted in the fugitives being returned to their masters, the cases did much to bring before the public the plight of the Negro slaves and to arouse sympathy and active support for the abolitionist cause. After one of these cases, the Margaret Garner case, one of the pro-slavery leaders of Cincinnati approached Rutherford Hayes and declared: "Mr. Hayes, hereafter I am with you. From this time forward, I will not only be a black republican, but I will be a damned abolitionist."⁴⁴

The Underground Railroad in Cincinnati continued to operate until the end of the Civil War when Levi Coffin, its reputed president, gathered the operators of Cincinnati together, resigned his office and declared the operations of the Railroad at an end. For years this organization proved to be the most tormenting abolitionist thorn in the side of the slave-holder of the South and their sympathizers in Cincinnati. On the other hand, the knowledge of its existence put hope into the hearts of the slaves, and we can be sure that often in the quiet of their cabins the darkies sang the song that told them: "Dare is a railroad underground', on which de negroes lope, and when dey gits dare ticket, dare hearts is full of hope. De engine nebber whistles and de cars dey make no noise, but dey carry off de darkies, dare wives, an' girls, an' boys."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Seibert, Underground Railroad, p. 303

⁴⁵Seibert, Mysteries, p. 278

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It is like venturing upon quicksand to attempt to link causes and effects, or to weigh the importance or significance of events when one is dealing with a disputed topic like the Civil War and the period immediately preceding it. Before the bloody war could be waged, there had to be a systematic moulding of public opinion and mental attitudes in both the North and the South. The full extent of the part played in the moulding of public opinion by the abolitionists is a question still seeking a full and satisfying answer. It is true, however, that had there been no Negro slavery there could have been no pro-slavery or anti-slavery agitation with the consequent disunion and war. History, after all, is what the historians say it is, and most historians of the Civil War period agree on one point, namely, that in the final analysis whatever the ultimate causes of the Civil War, these causes in some way or other have their roots in the opposing attitudes of the North and the South on the problem of slavery. This fact is undeniable. Whatever position a historian might adopt in his interpretation of the conflict, the question of slavery and abolition has occupied a more or less prominent position in his explanation. The nature of the institution of slavery and the hostility of the abolitionists toward it have been defined and described in various, and often contradictory terms, but, nonetheless, writers of history have constantly demonstrated their belief that

one cannot explain the coming of the Civil War without taking some notice of them. Even the writers of the modern "revisionist" school who maintain that the cause of the War cannot be explained in terms either of irreconcilable differences between North and South or of a struggle between diverse cultures, tend to single out the abolitionists for a major share of the blame for the War since it was this group that did the most in the magnification and the emotionalization of the "unreal" issues which resulted in armed conflict. Thus it is that an understanding of the philosophy and organizational efforts of the abolition movement is essential to an understanding approach to America's Civil War. And a complete and real understanding of this movement is impossible without a recognition of the importance of the Cincinnati abolitionists in the movement.

The abolition of slavery was not the work of any one person or group of persons. "It was the result of the united efforts of Mrs. Stowe with her wonderful book, of Garrison with his Liberator, of Whittier with his freedom breathing poetry, of Sumner in the Senate chamber, of Wendell Phillips with his caustic wit and unanswerable arguments, of Frederick Douglass with his convincing tales of personal wrong, of Gamaliel Bailey with his National Era, of Theodore Weld, the pioneer abolitionist, of James Birney, and of a host of other heroic workers."¹

It has been the purpose of this thesis to trace the development of this movement in a particular locality, Cincinnati, in the work of the principal abolitionists of that city, who were in turn some of the most important, though

¹Kaegy, "Lane Seminary Rebellion," p. 160

often the most overlooked, individuals in the entire movement. It has been generally ignored by historians that in this city in the 1830's one of the principal scenes of the great drama that was abolitionism was enacted. Before the Cincinnati footlights were gathered a band of men who were to play roles of major importance in the tragedy that was to have its resolution in one of the bloodiest wars of history. It was in Cincinnati that this group was to launch an attack on slavery which was to continue until this institution was finally abolished.

In the South, Cincinnati was often referred to as the headquarters of the abolitionists, and a study of the movement in the Queen City tends to justify this appellation. One has only to consider the labors of Theodore Weld, the Lane Rebels, James Birney and the operators of the Underground Railroad in Cincinnati to be convinced of this fact.

For the most part the writers of American history up to the present day have obscured the importance of the work done by the western abolitionists in their overemphasis of the role played in the drama of abolition by the abolitionists of New England in general and by William Lloyd Garrison in particular. Because of this, when the average man hears mention of the anti-slavery crusade he immediately thinks of Garrison and his Liberator as its guiding light and standard bearer. The fact is that Garrison was largely ignored by the abolitionists of the North, and the extent of his influence in the moulding public opinion is being called in question by modern students of the abolition movement. Indeed, it was the reaction of the South to his rancor and radicalism rather than the support of his northern admirers that gave him notoriety. In organizational leadership he was vastly inferior to

Tappan and Weld and his presidency of the American Anti-Slavery Society came at a time when the Society was in a state of decline. Gilbert Barnes, one of the outstanding students of the anti-slavery movement, has gone so far as to label Garrison an enemy of the anti-slavery impulse because of his anti-clerical obsession in a movement that from its inception had been inextricably bound up with the churches.²

More and more historians are coming to the conclusion that the anti-slavery impulse was primarily "moral" not "economic", and in arriving at this conclusion they are forced to admit a corollary necessarily following from this conclusion, namely, that the Midwest and its anti-slavery leaders, notably Theodore Dwight Weld and James G. Birney, were more important in the movement than New England and William Lloyd Garrison. If this conclusion is true, and the weight to historical evidence would indicate that it is, then it must also be admitted that Cincinnati played a role of no small importance in the anti-slavery movement.

Though no one will deny that the vast majority of Cincinnati's citizens were opposed to the abolitionists, and this because of the movement's practical repercussions rather than from any quarrel with its basic doctrine and philosophy, still it must be admitted that, from the earliest days of the organized movement Cincinnati had more than its share of exceptional abolition leaders, and was in truth a hotbed of abolitionism. If at first the West lagged behind the East in anti-slavery enterprise, the labors of Theodore Weld and James Birney, and the events following the Lane Debate were to focus the

²Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 98

attention of the entire nation, North and South, on the movement as it was found west of the Appalachian Mountains.

The Lane troubles publicized the abolition cause throughout the West. Indeed, the repercussions echoed all over the north. The Lane Debates were of tremendous importance in the development of the events that were to lead to the Civil War, for they marked a turning point in the transition from mild anti-slavery proposals to an aggressive abolitionism. Weld took the rebelling students of Lane and trained them in the technique of proclaiming the abolition cause, and sent them forth as pioneers in the North for the immediate abolition of slavery. From Lane Seminary emerged some of the greatest lecturers ever enlisted in the anti-slavery cause: Henry B. Stanton, Philemon Bliss, Marius Robinson, John Alvord, William Allen, James A. Thome, and a host of others bearing the impress of Weld's knowledge and zeal. These young men became evangelists of abolition, proclaiming its doctrine with great earnestness but in more moderate Christian spirit than was characteristic of Garrison's approach to the problem. In them and through them the work begun in Ohio by Theodore Weld was spread throughout Pennsylvania and New York, and elsewhere till the whole North was infected with a hatred of slavery and cried for its immediate abolition.

The struggle of the Lane students for freedom of discussion on the question of slavery was followed by Birney's fight for freedom of the press in dealing with the same problem. In a sense both lost, yet losing, won. The statement of the Lane students in which they gave their reasons for leaving the Seminary, Weld's expose of the whole Lane episode and the letters and editorials of Birney constitute as magnificent a defense of the freedom of discussion and the press

exists anywhere. Nowhere and by no one else were the cause of the slave and the constitutional rights of the free so closely and so fully identified as they were in these two instances. Both were to play a role second to none in arousing the interest and the conscience of the average man of the North in the problem of slavery, both as a moral evil and as a threat to their own constitutional rights.

During the heat of the presidential campaign of 1844 a newspaper editor asked the question: "Who is James G. Birney?" Answering his own query, he said, "Should he die this day, he has achieved more for the liberty and welfare of his country than all the presidents or other candidates for the presidency, that have lived since Washington died."³ Granted that this something of an exaggeration, still it does give us some inkling of the regard in which Birney was held by many in the North. He was the philosopher of the abolition movement who relied more on the force of logic and a well defined statement of intellectual reasons than on the exciting force of emotional appeal. His editorials in the Philanthropist are without doubt the clearest and most forceful exposition of the abolitionists' platform to be found in the plethora of anti-slavery writings. When the anti-slavery movement entered its political phase, he was one of the organizers of the Liberty Party and its candidate for president in 1840 and 1844. This fact alone tells us much about the esteem in which he was held by the more intellectual leaders of the movement and the influence he commanded within anti-slavery ranks. He was a man "whose pride was in service, whose ambition never degenerated into a selfish seeking for

³Fladeland, James G. Birney, p. v

success, and whose obstinacy was a determination that the cause of human freedom must not fail."⁴ He stood with that group of moderate, sincere men whose anti-slavery efforts were founded on intellectual conviction and deep-seated, humanitarian desires to free the Negro from the yoke of oppression. His native ability and training made him a leader in this group and this training and the development of this ability were the direct result of his years in Cincinnati as editor of the Philanthropist. It was in Cincinnati that his ideas were crystallized and his conviction of the intrinsic evil of slavery and of the threat that this institution posed for the constitutional rights of free men were deepened. Without doubt the importance of the role played in the anti-slavery movement in Cincinnati stems in large measure from the work accomplished there by James G. Birney.

Even if Cincinnati had not been the scene of the labors of Weld, the Lane Rebels and Birney, it still would have merited a special position of importance in the anti-slavery movement on the strength of the work done there by the operators of the Underground Railroad. It was generally agreed by men who were most active in this work that more runaway slaves crossed into free territory at Cincinnati than at any other point, and a check of the various newspaper accounts of escapes supports this view. When the runaways reached the Queen City they were protected by its intelligence and wealth, and instances of the recapture of runaways in that city are few and far between. The South knew this and bemoaned the fact that, for the most part, the

⁴Ibid., p. vi

absconding slave was perfectly safe once he reached Cincinnati. More fugitives were assisted in that city than in any other of Ohio, a state renowned for its underground system and the number of runaways that passed through it, and probably as many underground operators lived in Hamilton County, including Cincinnati of course, as in any other equal area in the North.

Thus it was that the work of Birney, Weld, the Lane Rebels and the operators of the Underground Railroad all added up to make Cincinnati a very important cog in the machinery of the anti-slavery crusade. As historical investigations of this phase of American history progress, it seems certain that the importance of the Cincinnati abolitionists will receive in larger measure the recognition that is their due and which, to this time, has been denied them. A comprehensive and objective evaluation of the period demands this.

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APPENDIX I

THE CINCINNATI PREAMBLE AND RESOLUTIONS

JANUARY 22, 1836

Whereas, the union of the states, embracing a great variety of soil and climate, could only have been effected in the first instance, by patriotic sacrifice, mutual forbearance, and a decided spirit of compromise. Our forefathers spurning individual considerations, looked mainly to the great object of becoming one nation, influenced by our common interest, regarding each other as fellow-citizens of the same great country. Among the sacrifices made there were many of feeling, as well as of interest. The South was found in possession of a kind of property, which did not exist to any extent in the middle and eastern states; after a full and thorough discussion, the compact of union was consummated, leaving to the slave States, the full discretion of settling the question in their own way, and in their own good time; the implied guarantee was thus promulgated that slave property should be held sacred by the Constitution, and be protected by its laws.

The course pursued by the Abolition and Anti-Slavery Societies, of the free States, is calculated not only to render unstable the tenure of this kind of property, but threatens to spread desolation and murder throughout the peaceful borders of our Sister States. The imprudence, the immorality, the wickedness of this course are already effecting our social relations, jeopardizing our internal commerce, and throwing obstacles in the way of those great contemplated schemes of improvement by which enlightened men of the different States, are struggling to draw closer the bonds of brotherly feeling and social intercommunication. The case has become alarming; in this emergency it behooves the temperate and prudent among us, who appreciate the value of our glorious union to take some direct action on the subject; otherwise we may expect some evil spirit to arise, to overcloud our brilliant perspective, by dashing the cup of harmony to pieces. The urgency applies particularly to Cincinnati, inasmuch as a few misguided men have recently made it the theatre for disseminating doctrines and sentiments entirely at variance with the views and feelings of the great mass of our population.

Resolved. That it is a breach of our highest political contract, and a violation of good faith and common honesty, to disturb the internal condition and domestic arrangements of the slave-holding states.

Resolved. That this meeting view with distrust and abhorrence the course pursued by Abolition Societies, which, with professions of mercy and good feeling on their lips are advocating measures which are pregnant with injury to the political, commercial and friendly relations between the States.

Resolved. That while as free men we cherish the freedom of the press, and of speech, as among the sacred provisions of the constitution, we view them as controlled by the same rules which govern other rights, viz., to be used in such a manner as not to injure the acknowledged rights of another.

Resolved. That the discussion of Anti-Slavery Societies and the circulation of papers and pamphlets, tending to excite in any manner the Negroes of the slave-holding States, is a profligate abuse of this right, as immoral, and cruel in reference to the Southern States, as it is impolitic and ruinous as regards ourselves.

Resolved. That fully impressed as we are with the insignificance, as regards numbers of the abolitionists of the West, and aware of the excited and provoked feelings of the great mass of our fellow-citizens opposed to their views, we consider it our duty to warn these deluded men of the odium they are creating, and of the danger they are incurring in persevering in their weak and vain struggles for an object impracticable and unattainable.

Resolved. That the course pursued by the Anti-Slavery Society throughout the country, is daily weakening the ties by which the States are united and must if persisted in, terminate in the dissolution of the union; we are, therefore, contrained to consider the advocates of such institutions, as enemies of the happiness of the people and to the peace and prosperity of the state.

Resolved. That in the opinion of this meeting, the course of the advocates of Abolition is directly calculated to defeat their object; to impose upon the slave, and perpetuate additional burthens (sic); and to restrain and interrupt the benevolent exertions of individuals in the slave states to ameliorate their condition.

Resolved. That we coincide fully in the enlightened views taken by the governor of New York in his late message, on this subject, and believe with him, that if in defiance of the well established popular sentiment, to sustain in its purity the integrity of the federal compact, these "misguided men" continue to pursue a course at war with the same, that we will join in recommending the prompt and efficient legislation of this State, in conjunction with other members of the confederacy, to arrest their designs, and thereby sustain the original compact which made us a united people.

Resolved. That the nature and tendency of Abolition Societies and the conduct of certain persons connected with them are at variance with the federal compact, and the mutual obligations of the States united thereby; and if not treasonable, are revolutionary in their tendencies, and ought to be discountenanced by all good men; and that we will not suffer the inflammatory

publications of such institutions to be introduced into our homes, counting-rooms, or workshops.

Resolved. That the institution of slavery, as it exists in this country, under the sanction of our constitution, and happy form of government, is known to all who have sought an asylum in our country; and to whom the benefits of citizenship are extended. We therefore, consider it indecorous for such persons to engage in projects which are calculated to subvert the institutions of our country.

Resolved. That this meeting will exert every lawful effort to surpress the publication of any abolition paper in this city or neighborhood. And that they advise, in a spirit of frankness such as may be concerned in a project of this description, to abandon the attempt.

Resolved. That while we approve and advocate upon all subject, the toleration of individual freedom of speech and opinion, yet we feel constrained to deprecate the formation of such Societies as lead manifestly to an infringement if not destruction of the federal compact. And that while every good citizen is obligated to resist confederacies of this description, they do most solemnly condemn the Abolition Association in all its branches, as necessarily conducive to these results.

Resolved. That in the opinion of this meeting, it is not expedient for Congress to adopt a course of legislation for the District of Columbia by which the citizens thereof will be deprived of the right of property in their slaves which right we believe is secured to them by the constitution and laws of the land.

On the motion of Colonel Pendelton it was

Resolved. That a copy of the proceedings of this meeting, signed by the officers together with the preamble and resolution be forwarded to the senators and representatives in Congress from Ohio - to the members of the senate and house of representatives of Ohio from this city and county, and to his excellency, the governor of the State, with a request that he will lay the same before the general assembly.

On the motion of Judge Wright it was

Resolved. That the publishers of the several papers of this city be respectfully requested to publish the proceedings of this meeting.

Samuel W. Davis, President

APPENDIX II

CITIZENS' COMMITTEE OF JULY, 1836¹

Jacob Burnet - He is a man of wealth, a lawyer of the first eminence, a Supreme Court Judge, a Senator in Congress, a citizen of extensive influence.

Josiah Lawrence - A merchant of high character, and President of the Lafayette Bank.

Robert Buchanan - Also a merchant of high reputation, and President of the Commercial Bank of Cincinnati.

Nicholas Longworth - A lawyer, retired from practice - the most extensive property-holder in the city.

Oliver M. Spencer - A minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a man of wealth and highly esteemed in the city.

David Loring - A large property holder, one of the most enterprising and active business men of the city.

David T. Disney - Has been a member of both Houses of the Ohio Legislature, and Speaker of both; an influential politician, conversant with the interests of the city, and extensively engaged in business.

Thomas W. Bakewell - A wealthy and highly respectable merchant.

John P. Foote, and William Green - Gentlemen of intelligence and wealth, and proprietors of large stock in the Cincinnati Water Works.

William Burke - Postmaster of the city and minister of the gospel.

Morgan Neville - Known throughout the country; esteemed wherever he is known.

Timothy Walker - A respectable lawyer; one of the lecturers in the Cincinnati College.

¹Cincinnati Gazette, August 2, 1836

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Thomas Leo Hogan, S.J.
has been read and approved by three members of the Department of
History

The final copies have been examined by the director of the
thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact
that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the
thesis is now given final approval with reference to content,
form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

January 10, 1957
Date

Charles H. Metzger, S.J.
Signature of Adviser